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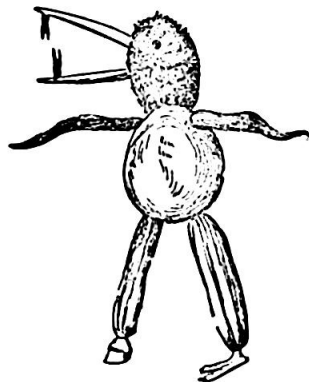
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KETCHUP OVER THE PARK

Steve Healey

We who crossed so many bridges to be in this park,
to hear the hugely amplified music and to support the troops,
they who are like hamburger meat receiving support
from the eaters of grilled ground beef patties, we who
fire up a million grills in the shade of the ketchup factory,
who know that its neon-red bottle will never cease to flash,

Lord, we are not worthy of your flavor, but we have come
from so many directions, we have crossed rivers with monsters
in them, we have felt like a perfect Frisbee toss,
that lightness when you first start over a bridge and think,
my God, that river is so far below, I am being delivered
from evil, I make a sign of the cross, I acknowledge
that people die, but I also acknowledge that ketchup exists,
you have to put it on top of the meat, never on the bottom,
so it rises to the roof of your mouth, the sugary tang
enters your sinuses, your brain flashes good red music,

it's so good that you know some enemy must be coming,
like an enigmatic prophesy, like the one from *Macbeth*,
"until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane," and we notice
that some of us are wearing tree costumes, suspicion
mounts, we know that Macbeth is going to get fucked,
and it is we who will do the fucking, we who will eat
the hamburgers and say good-bye, this war is ended.

THE PASSENGER:

Johannes Goransson

I was admitted. I had to answer questions. Are you gay? Are you a terrorist? Are you a Communist? I answered no to all the questions. After a while I started noticing that the questions had changed. What do insects have to do with cinema? Can you hear me? Are we underwater? Can I kick you in the face? Why do your spasms look infantile? Do you know how to break a radio? But I kept answering no. Because that's what I wanted to hear myself say with that bag over my face.

TRAUMA:

There must be a clearance sale on fur in the welfare state. I am sweating profusely and the animals are not hygienic. There must be a riot in the exhausted state because I cannot get through. In the case of an impasse like this, it is important to use the ganglia to take care of the inflamed hole. You must not allow the insects to enter the ovule. If they do you must immediately extinguish it with felt and fat. A rib cage can always be salvaged but a nest is hard to eliminate. You have nothing to be ashamed of. You have nothing. Allow me to gently sterilize the fur.

TRAUMA:

In the Rampant State, nobody understands how to clean the ganglia. Nobody knows how to thread it, how to abuse it, how to interrogate prisoners with it. In the Rampant State all the torture devices involve drowning or lynching. The General wants to lynch all the black male bodies with moths. He uses obvious innuendoes, to make sure his base understands him, but he cannot say it openly. To do so would be to offend the refined tastes of his base. If anybody accuses him of racism, he replies that the accusers are "playing the race card." I am playing the race card with a revolver pointing to my head. The revolver has an autonomic system. It is loaded with two silver bullets: one for my black brain and one for my insect nerve.

SKIN, INC.

Thomas Sayers Ellis

A black arm, unarmed, bent upward
at the elbow
so the blow slides off.
Wanted so bad,
 back then, to hit back
but didn't dare, ever, strike their tense, twisted spin.
Their ruled, loose-leaf,
paged air.
First they conjugate you,
then you die.
Them, laying out by their lonesome, blocking sun.
 You, shirtless, serving drinks,
one of the brown things they bleach, eat.
If punctuation
were a punch,
I'd publish lines of fists.
Sorry I know
"cracker" and "honky" hurt,
but nothing fruits a noose like the n-word,
 white acceptance or revolt.
No more little boxes,
stacked, like the ones in poems.
A deeper sense of verse frees skin.
I am not merely *in*
 this thing I am *in*. I am *it*.
Born in the morning to reform form's broken economy.
To sit-in
in the sit-in
in the margins.

GENDER FABLES

Carmen Gimenez Smith

(THE GRAND TOUR)

The king is slain, small death because
we used his porn as atlas. Each scene
was our next frontier and we crossed it.
Now he is all tumescent cat eyes, petulance.

He says, "My mother never
danced, I'm always lonely." It's *blah blah*
blah. It's therefore, therefore.

The headboard's made of driftwood
and Xmas lights, and I just want to fuck
and smoke clove cigarettes like we used to.

I want the hasty shower with the smell of pine-sol.
I want to be the think I thought up that day, but
I've already run out of disguise.
Instead it's some amour, plush velvet,
some pretending to read Proust. We're propping
up the corpse of romantic love.

This king is here to cut his teeth
on our asymmetry. "Everyone can dance,"
I answer because we've already split
the floorboards. We're in the shipwreck bottle
and the king's really a parrot cawing *shore, shore*.

(GUERRILLA ROMEOS)

They built a tent city
on the periphery of Sodom
moved by idealism and
the spectacle of a briefer Fall.

They were driven out by angelwhores
that threw rocks at the window.
Someone get a broom
for the broken tabernacle.

What to do, what to do with
the raw assembly line of pillars?
Mistaking it for the flood,
the squandered daughters

flee with all their new wealth,
fecundity and hollow;
vanity and thanatos.
Now this is how you rattle taboo.

(REFRAIN FROM THE CONFESSIONS)

Take the jar and crack it open.
The jar is a plaster cast of my
down there, so take that jar far into the end
of the tunnel. Defile that jar, burn it.
Tag it. Venerate it with dung and Sappho.
Don't hang my jar over me.
It's my jar! It's my jar!
Decoupage the jar with mouths
cut from *Cosmo*, mister death,
fill it with our minstrel blood
or the placenta from our collective lacuna.
Grow lascivious magnolias in it,
heavy-lipped and lush with pollen.
The jar houses my illusions
of eating men like hair balls.

ALL NIGHT A WOMAN PRAYS FOR GIRLS SHE DOES NOT KNOW BY NAME

Ian Williams

A woman gave me a flower in an envelope.
Its stalk is what *radioactive* must look like
in a vein—pure fluorescence.

The humidity in the envelope has curled the leaves
around their spines, their ribs. And the corolla,
pressed flat, could be a woman's head in profile;
the sepal, a green bonnet. There's something else
where the stem forks: a smaller bud,
the flower carrying a child on her hip,
a child articulated so perfectly, like the fingernails
of a baby, you want to count its parts.

If not taken apart, the flower will fall apart anyway—
alopecia, self-pity, *baby please*. Why did she give it to me?
Why an envelope?—crumple all that past. Then crumple
the name *aster lateriflorus*, *lady in black*,
so the thing that you're looking at is a frog,
a pig fetus on a dissection tray, reprehensible
for—who's making you do this? All night
she prays for girls she does not know
by name, the girl deflowered by a fist, the girl
with a girl with a cord round its neck, the girl
at the Girls Girls Girls.

DOPPLER ELEGY

Ben Lerner

The leaves appear to increase in brightness
The dim star in the periphery disappears
At dusk as rods shift toward the shorter waves
If you turn and try to look at it directly
It maps onto the fovea, rich in cones
Which privilege color over line. I turned
I tore it. Now I see the elegy beneath
Long lines of cloud with poor opacity
A pattern stamped into green foil

~

With feeling, how the eye moves constantly
To keep light from the object falling
Gently on the little clearing. They call this
Like rain that never reaches ground
Reading, like birds that lure predators away
Virga, or the failure of the gaze to reach
By faking injury, like flares that bend
Across the lake in total dark
Missiles from their path

DOPPLER ELEGY

The good news is light is scattered such
Toxicity means the paint must be applied
The apparent brightness of the surface
By robots one atom at a time, bad news
Is the same regardless of the angle of view
I thought I should be the one to tell you
Simultaneously, how monks sing chords
A kind of silence, what we might call
The military applications of Cézanne



Its physics occurred to me while falling
Through rain that wasn't moving. I woke
Before I reached the ground like virga
To find Ari gone. The flattened stems
Only because there was no ground
Allow the words to tremble in the breath
As such. There is no way to read this
Once, and that's love, or aloud, and that's
Breakwaters echo long lines of cloud

THE SHERPAS OF CANADA

G. C. Waldrep

The Sherpas of Canada
are leading you, and your automobile,
north, to a lake.

The automobile is old.
Maybe you're old, too, or maybe

you're just getting older.

On an island in the center of the lake
stands what's left
of a house.
Inside it live three little girls.

The house has collapsed,
but the little girls don't seem to mind.
The little girls
are actually dolls,
but it's possible they don't know this.

Will you be our doll,
one of the little girls asks.
She has a smudge
on her porcelain cheek,
and one of her eyebrows is missing.

What you want to say is:
I'm sorry

about the love thing, how nobody

ever quite got that right,

and for the way I treated the kittens,
and for all those bad movies.

What you want to say is:

I'm sorry,

I just can't be a doll to dolls.

Instead you find

you can't say anything. It's as if
someone had painted a fake mouth
over your real mouth.

It's cold, and the wind's picking up.

You try your keys

in the automobile's ignition.

Nothing happens.

Behind you, the Sherpas start singing,
or maybe that's just the wind.

OVERDOING IT

commissioned by the POLISH CULTURAL INSTITUTE

music | JEFFREY LEPENDORF

poem | PIOTR SOMMER

translation | CHRISTIAN HAWKEY AND THE POET

for BARITONE, B $\flat$ CLARINET, VIOLIN, CELLO, VIBRAPHONE, OBJECTS

PROGRAM NOTE

As a lifelong insomniac, I responded immediately to Piotr Sommer's "Overdoing It," a perfect portrait of being kept awake by one's own incessant thoughts. Two Chopin piano works—confused, misremembered, confabulated as in a dream—provide the stuff of the music: the so-called "Raindrop Prelude," with its insistent taps of A-flat, and, likewise repeating and repeating G-sharp (which is the same pitch as A-flat on the piano), the *Étude* op. 10 no. 3 in E Major. Chopin called the latter his favorite melody, and it's one I imagine keeping him up all night.

—JEFFREY LEPENDORF

Note on Percussion: Table percussion consists of two objects, river stones, flowerpots, shakers, or other, non-ringing, subtle-sounding objects—the resulting sound should not be particularly bright. Four mallets are used—three are medium wound for the vibraphone with the remaining mallet used for the table percussion. The vibraphone is prepared in the following manner: a single metal paper clip is to be taped flat to the center of the middle A-flat. When the motor of the vibraphone is on it should be set to a wide vibrato.

OVERDOING IT

Piotr Sommer

All night the cicadas measured time
and yet I couldn't make it to sleep.
I was late by three hours,
then by four, then five.
I was hoping time would turn itself off,
allow me to somehow reach the finish line.
And yet even through the wind I heard
how mercilessly it thumped and banged
or actually: ticked on, lovelessly.
And without sleeping at all I dreamed
I was in a hurry, though I should know
a hurry is no use. No use, no use,
I was calling out the refrain, as if playing staccato
or with my own leg plucking the string, the wing.
Then I discovered I was the one keeping time,
rubbing against space, ticking from the inside,
and would sleep for good if I stopped.

OVERDOING IT

$J = 60$

This musical score is for the film 'The Night of the Hunter' and includes parts for the following instruments and voices:

- Baritone
- Clarinet in B $\flat$
- Violin
- Cello
- Percussion (Table objects (non-ringing), Medium round mallets)
- Vibraphone
- Bass (B)
- B $\flat$ Clarinet (B $\flat$ Cl.)
- Violin (Vin.)
- Viola (Vic.)
- Percussion (Perc.)
- Vibraphone (Vib.)

The score is written in 3/4 time and features dynamic markings such as *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, and *f*. It includes performance instructions like 'Motor off' and 'All night'.

11

mp *p* *mp*

B. the ci-ca-das mea-sured time and yet I could not make it to sleep.

B. Cl.

mp *mp*

Vln.

mp

Vlc.

mp

Perc.

Vib.

16

p

B.

10

B. Cl.

mp *p*

Vln.

p

Vlc.

mp *p*

Perc.

Vib.

30 *p*

B *I was late by three hours,*

B♭ Cl. *p*

Vln. *p*

Vlc. *p*

Perc.

Vib.

36 *mp*

B *then by four, then*

B♭ Cl. *mp*

Vln. *mp*

Vlc. *mp*

Perc.

Vib.

The first system of the musical score includes staves for Bass (B), B♭ Clarinet (B♭ Cl.), Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vic.), Percussion (Perc.), and Vibraphone (Vib.). The Bass staff features a melodic line with a 'puck' marking and a 'live.' section. The B♭ Clarinet staff has a 'live.' section. The Violin staff includes a 'puck' marking and a 'p < mp' dynamic marking. The Viola staff has a 'puck' marking and a 'p < mp' dynamic marking. The Percussion staff shows a rhythmic pattern with a 'puck' marking. The Vibraphone staff has a 'puck' marking and a 'p < mp' dynamic marking.

32 *mp* *accel*

B I was hop - ing time would turn it self

B♭ Cl *mp*

Vln. *mp*

Vlc. *mp*

Perc.

Vib. *mp*

33 $\text{♩} = 90$
 mf

B

off. turn it-self off.

B. Cl.

mf

Vla.

Vic.

mf

Perc.

Vib.

mf
 Ped. chord changes

34

B

turn it-self off. turn it-self

B. Cl.

Vla.

Vic.

Perc.

Vib.

11 *f*

B

off. al - - - low

B. Cl.

f

Vln.

f

Vlc.

f

Perc.

Vib.

f

11

B

me - - - to

B. Cl.

Vln.

Vlc.

Perc.

Vib.

47 *ff* *f*

B

some how reach

B♭ Cl.

ff *f*

Vln.

ff *f*

Vlc.

ff *f*

Perc.

Vib.

ff *f*

50 *rit.*

B

the

B♭ Cl.

50

Vln.

50

Vlc.

50

Perc.

Vib.

50

♩ = 60

31

B

fl. nish line. _____

B♭ Cl.

31

p

Vin.

p

Vic.

p

Perc.

Motor on (wide vib.)

Vib.

p

Pod. →

sr

B

And yet even through the wind

B♭ Cl

pp

Vln

Vlc

Perc

Vib

77 *mp*

B *or ac-tual-ly: ticked em. ticked*

B♭ Cl. *mf* *p < mp* *mf* *p < mp* *p < mp*

Vln. *mp* *p* *mf* *express* *p*

Vlc. *mp* *p* *p* *mp*

Perc.

Vib. *mf* *mp subito p*

77 *p*

B *no. less-ly.*

B♭ Cl. *p < mp* *p < mp* *p < mp*

Vln. *p* *express* *mp*

Vlc. *p*

Perc.

Vib. *mp*

And with out

p

pp

p

p

p

p

pedal down unless otherwise indicated

p

mf

(dolcetto)

mf

sleep - ing at all I dreamed I was in a bur - ry.

p

mp

mf

mf

90 *mp* *mf* ($\text{♩} = 90$)

B

B♭ Cl. *through I should know*

Vln. *p* *mf*

Vic. *mf*

Perc.

Vib. *Motor off* *mf* Pol. chord changes

91

B

B♭ Cl. *a hurry is no use. No use, no*

Vln.

Vic.

Perc.

Vib.

97

B. *mf* *acc.* I was cal - ling -

B. Cl. *mf*

Vln. *mf*

Vlc. *mf*

Perc. *mf*

Vib. *mf*

101

3 *mf* *mf* out the re - frain, as if play - ing stac -

B. Cl. *mf* *f*

Vln. *mf* *f*

Vlc. *mf* *f*

Perc. *mf* *f*

Vib. *mf* *f*

f Dampen reeds with mallets

103

B

ca - la - or with my own leg pluck - ing the

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vlc.

Perc.

Vib.

pizz.

pizz.

104

B

string. the wing.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vlc.

Perc.

Vib.

rit. -----

arco

arco

$\text{♩} = 60$

III *p* *< ppp >*

B Then _____ I dis-covered I _____ was the one keeping time, _____

III *ppp* *pp* *ppp* *p*

B. Cl.

III *p*

Vln.

III *p*

Vlc.

III *p*

Perc.

III *p*

Vib.

116 *mp*

B ruh - ing a - gainst space, _____

116 *mp*

B. Cl.

116 *mp*

Vln.

116 *mp*

Vlc.

116 *mp*

Perc.

116

Vib.

Motor on →

III

B

B. Cl.

Vln.

Vlc.

Perc.

Vib.

III

B

B. Cl.

Vln.

Vlc.

Perc.

Vib.

p

tick-ing from the in - side. —

121

B

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vlc.

Perc.

Vib.

121

122

f *ff* *f* *ff*

121 *p*

B

and world sleep for good

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vlc.

Perc.

Vib.

121

122

p *f* *ff* *f* *ff*

124 *mf* *p* (eyes shut) stopped.

B.

125 B. Cl.

125 Vln.

125 Vlc.

125 Perc.

125 Vib.

6'20"

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score for the piece "Overdoing It". The score is written for six instruments: Bass (B.), B♭ Clarinet (B. Cl.), Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vlc.), Percussion (Perc.), and Vibraphone (Vib.). The page shows measures 124 and 125. The Bass part begins in measure 124 with a half note, followed by a melodic line in measure 125. The B♭ Clarinet, Violin, and Viola parts enter in measure 125 with eighth-note patterns. The Percussion part has a single note in measure 125. The Vibraphone part plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment throughout measures 124 and 125. Dynamic markings include *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *p* (piano). Performance instructions include "(eyes shut)" and "stopped." above the Bass staff. The page number "6'20\"" is located at the bottom right.

Listen to a recorded performance of "Overdoing It" at www.jubilat.org.

WE BRUISE, WE ARE DRAPED IN A FINE-HAIRED SKIN

Andrew Michael Roberts

aren't we a noisesome fragile
kind of fruit. blameless and plumping
up in the unencumbered sun.
while some inert and slightly toxic
seed has cracked, and aren't we pregnant now
with a slow and secret poison.
can't you see it in the open palms of our eyes.
we are toothy and always full
of new words for it: apocrypha, scape-
grace, luminescence. tympani.
today a flock of songbirds attacked the morning
traffic. a great silence gave way
to the embrace of glass and bone.
not to worry, a satellite is circling
over each of us. you can feel a subtle hum,
a frequency in the sapwood buzzing
your brief existence.
from your loving ignorant tree, look up:
the contrails, the wing feathers,
the improbable blue. a periodic glint
of foil lodged reassuringly like a sliver
in the skin of the sky.

SHINY

for once let's wake up without gleaming.
let's try terribly unhappy and see
if something hidden creeps out
hungry to gnaw at the heartbone.
trust me, i know nearly nothing
certainly. just imagine an atom.
imagine god huge and happy
with his cold clumsy hand
hovered over us like a snuffer.
in the fall, when everything's supposed
to be short-lived and sad.
and the coyotes, crying their shame-
less love to the shameful night. and
the corn leaning in to unfurl
its thousand thirsty ears.
let's go shiny and secular
and bare-chested under a blood moon
into the listening sea. where the stalks
stripe and muffle us. where camouflaged
we can be somber as the snails
carry on with their safe secrets.
we can curl unsatisfied among them,
fold into each other like husks
and see what fresh unfortunates
morning makes of us.
quiet now. we can be intricate
and difficult and necessary as soil.
we are full of potential.

POEM

Matthew Zapruder

My friend and I were watching television
and laughing. Then we saw
white letters begin to crawl along
the bottom of the screen.
People were floating on doors and holding
large pieces of cardboard
with telephone numbers scrawled
in black fear up to the helicopters.
The storm had very suddenly
come and now it was gone.
I saw one aluminum rooftop flash
in sunlight, it would have burned
the feet of anyone trying to wait there.
My friend by then had managed
to will her face into that familiar living
detachment mask. I thought
of the very large yellow house
of my childhood, how through
my bedroom window I could reach my hand
out and upward and touch
the branch of an elm. At night
in the summer I heard the rasp
of a few errant cicadas whose timing
devices had for them tragically drifted.
And the hoarse glassy call
of the black American crow.
Though I am at least halfway through
my life, part of my spirit

still lives there, thinking very soon
I will go down to the room where my father
carefully places his fingers on the strings of the guitar
he bought a few years before I was born.
Picking his head up he smiles
and motions vaguely with his hand, communicating
many contradictory things.

A GEORGE HOLLIDAY RODNEY KING VIDEO (DIRECTOR'S CUT)

Brian Gilmore

dred scott.
martin king.
rodney king.
dred king
martin luther scott.
dred luther rodney.
rodney luther king
rodney luther king
the rev dr. rodney luther king
was pulled over last night
by the los angeles police
in memphis, tennessee
and taken to the lorraine motel.
he escaped
got a few blocks
down the street but he was caught
and brought back to the motel.
they asked him where did he
work. he said he hadn't
had a job in quite awhile. now
and then he preached sermons. they
told him he was lying. dred scott.
martin scott.
martin king.
king martin.
king rodney

king dred.
the king of dred.
the rev king scott martin dred is a liar.

he was free.
he was on the balcony.
he was unarmed.
he was a minister.
he was probably drunk.
he was driving drunk
he was resisting.
he was a resister.
he had been to the mountain
top. he was a man of peace.
he wanted to march. los
angeles. missouri. memphis.
he had seen wisconsin
the promised land
the court settlement.
rodney
martin
dred
king.
scott
king.

a drunken liar. a man with
no real job
driving skills; a man who
preaches an occasional
sermon
almost died

a
slave
on some balcony in los
angeles surrounded
by cops with stun guns
batons
explanations
supreme court
orders, caught on film
by francis ford
steven spielberg
soderburgh
coppola
orson
frank
welles
capra; that
is exactly how
it
happened.

i watched it without
any buttered popcorn, some
loud drunken minister
resisting arrest in the
19th century. a war will
be fought over a movie.
"chances are" by johnny
mathis is the theme song.

anybody seen ken burns?

COMMERCE

Kim Parko

there is something that I have
erased. there is no record
of it. there is no subtle indentation
where graphite has dug its shallows
into paper. a rainstorm comes
suddenly and with hail. the hard,
white stones are gone
within minutes. my room contains
the kind of darkness that needs
brightening to see and dimming
to dream. all day the bed sheets
have built kingdoms around
me. the King is not sure
if I am an obstacle or an untapped
resource. King, let me assure you
of nothing. take your slaves
into my body. see if there is any ore
to be mined there. otherwise, cut
a highway through me, along
which your commerce will flow.

HOLD

when I wake from the nap, I am cold.
and the place where my pet
used to be is empty. the struggles
from the morning have tied
themselves to my wrists
and ankles. there are a variety of ways
to rub sleep from your breath. one is simply
to blow and blow out each dream
that haunts your lungs. every time
I hear a machine, I put my hand
to my chest. I am still trying
to differentiate between my ghost
and my embryo. there are the seasons
of the day tinting the birdcage. I'll sleep
again and wake in the morning
with a tapered beak pecking at my side.
not nocturnal, this bird,
but perennial. that is: never entirely
without a root plummeting my mind.

MURDERESS

the murderess keeps
to herself. she speaks to no one
and stands in a patch of dying
grass. her trigger finger is muscled
from use. the sun empties out
its light and deflates onto a hill. she turns
her head like an owl and looks across
the large shadow that falls on this side
of the world. I know
the murderess. I have put my head
where she keeps
her head. all over
the ground there are footprints that have
been grown over. even under my house,
there are footprints. and there are old
struggles covered
with vines. the murderess
has an edge in her eye that can cut
another's eye. I've run my eye across
the edge of her eye. I've stood on
a patch of brown grass. I've
touched the trigger.

SOUL IN GOD

Tomaž Šalamun

A white ball, an adventure,
a deer that drips.
If you bite, if you fall asleep
without color or smell.

The basket cannot endure water.
The human eye cannot endure the senses.
My coat is gold from the inside.
How my paste oozes!

And floods me, which is
more than a flower. A tiny senseless
dot of enlightenment,
a pregnant abyss.

Pilgrims, you who swallow
onions, and you don't know why—
because! Off the path is
the biggest waterfall!

I will never want,
say, or fidget. I will only scatter
the southern fruit. And lie
down as in a courtyard.

Only the shining white
beeches on the throne
tasted the want of amber.
I am as a soldier in the shade.

Translated from the Slovenian by Ana Jelnikar and Joshua Beckman.

I VALUE MY SEMEN

Storm away, waterfall, storm away.
To rub in one's veins and the movie.

Storm away, waterfall, storm away.
The flesh flows. Staccato flesh.

The hour light. Goethe light.
Her and white stockings.

It's inescapable. Wildly.
The dots on the doge's head.

The central little cats.
The dots on the doge's head.

The central little cats.
To insert the ore in the birch's shrine.

Here the house breathes and sleeps.
It listens to the apex.

Translated from the Slovenian by Michael Thomas Taren and the author.

OUT OF SIGHT, YOU ARE ALL THINGS TO ME, YOU ARE EVERYTHING TO ME, WITHOUT YOU, ETC.

Ashley Butler

The fastest man on earth tested safety belts, ejection seats, and the limits of human deceleration. The *Gee Whiz* was a 680kg carriage secured by four *slippers* to a 610m track in New Mexico in 1947. The fastest man traveled faster on a rocket-sled than a .45-caliber bullet released from a single action. Occasionally the blood would rush into his eyes, causing him to see only red. Occasionally the blood would rush to the back of his head, causing him to see only white. A pool of water stood at the far end of the rocket-sled track to help arrest the fastest man. In the desert, bodies of water attract all kinds of life, including blackbirds and magpies. The red epaulets of a red-winged blackbird determine its success in mating and in holding ground. At speeds above 600mph, the collision of man and bird would leave a lifelike imprint in the man's breast. A coat of arms is formally described by the blazon which begins with the background, the shield. The fastest man's sight began to fade the day after his fastest run. The silhouette of a rocket plane remained seared into the retina of his right eye so that he may turn and place the plane against a body, before a mountain, above the sea.

THE SEARCH FOR NAMES

Kimiko Hahn

The right to name Planet X belonged to the Lowell Observatory
where the Kansas farm boy engaged

to photograph night heavens using a blink comparator

quickly suggested *Slipher*, after his superior.

The widow, Constance Lowell, suggested *Zeus*, *Lowell*, and *Constance*.

Then eleven-year-old Venetia Burney
put forward *Pluto*, ruler of the underworld

(as well a dark and cold terrain)
and a god who could turn invisible.

She was eating breakfast with her grandfather, Falconer Maden,
when he read about the search in the dailies.

Lucky girl. Fortunate planet. Exultant netherworld.

ON "THE TOSA DIARY": AN INTERVIEW WITH KIMIKO HAHN

Kimiko Hahn is the author of seven books: *The Narrow Road to the Interior* (2006), *The Artist's Daughter* (2002), *Mosquito and Ant* (1999), *Volatile* (1999), *The Unbearable Heart* (1995), *Earshot* (1992), and *Air Pocket* (1989). *Toxic Flora*, a science-inspired collection of poems, is forthcoming from W. W. Norton in 2010. Her honors include the Shelley Memorial Prize from the Poetry Society of America, the PEN/Voelcker Award, an American Book Award, a Theodore Roethke Memorial Poetry Prize, a Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Writers' Award, an Association of Asian American Studies Literature Award, as well as fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts. Hahn is a distinguished professor in the MFA Program in Creative Writing and Literary Translation at Queens College, City University of New York. This interview was conducted by Robert N. Casper in Brooklyn on September 27, 2009.



I'd like to ask the first question: when you first read "The Tosa Diary," without a background in classical Japanese literature, what were some of your impressions?

jubilat Editor-at-Large Jen Bervin passed it along to me, and she pointed out specific passages she found lovely—I did too! I was excited about it as a diary—I especially appreciated how it included the mundane aspects of a long trip. I also found the narrator compelling, as she wavered between detailing the trip and lamenting her lost daughter. Of course, I was very excited by the role poetry

played. We think of poetry as existing on the periphery of American culture, so the way it serves as a means of social engagement amazed me. I was also fascinated by the way the narrator was constantly judging each poem, especially in relation to its authors. The poems, too, are a central part of the storytelling, framing the narrative and adding a counter to the prose.

I now think of "The Tosa Diary" as a hybrid text—I wouldn't have used that term when I was studying Japanese literature as an undergraduate, or as a graduate student. Donald Keene, one of the great writers about Japanese literature, says, "Mixed genres have always been important in Japan," then goes on to explain that this work "was closely linked to almost every variety of literature composed during the Heian period" (the "Golden Age" for literature in Japan, from 793 to 1185). I still look at it with fresh eyes—not as a student in her twenties, but as a writer with several books behind her—and it's newly inspiring.

Is it newly inspiring to you in terms of the permission it gives you, and which you may not find in American literature?

Well, Japanese literature is not split between poetry and prose—that's certainly true in *zuihitsu*, which can contain poetry, as well as *haibun*. None of these categories are without blurring for the Japanese. I love the way in which poetry is a part of "The Tosa Diary." It isn't simply a diary with poetry in it—it's all of a piece, and you can't take either out without changing it into something else. Another important dimension: the diary itself is often fabricated, which never bothered me. I think of it as poetic license. I do think that some Western readers are bothered because they expect a true record of events.

In American literature, the relationship between fact and fiction is highly problematic. The idea that this highly influential "diary" was not only

fictionalized but celebrated for its fictionalization challenges American notions of truth and the self, especially in relation to such forms as the memoir.

I've been re-reading Donald Keene's book *Seeds in the Heart: Japanese Literature from Earliest Times to the Late Sixteenth Century*, which has a section on Heian diaries. Keene discusses the importance of introspection—that's what the diaries record, rather than big events. It's a slice of life; it doesn't mean it's the truth in terms of factual truth. Many of the great diaries from that period were written several years after the events they describe, and some of them were even written in third person—which is very weird to our way of thinking. We wouldn't call that a diary. "The Tosa Diary," as you know, was written by a man in a woman's voice.

I want to talk about gender in "The Tosa Diary"—what do you make of the author creating a female narrator, both historically and for you as a contemporary writer?

One reason I was attracted to studying Japanese literature was because the Heian period was dominated by women. The literature, up to that point, had been written by men in Chinese with poetic allusions to Chinese literature. So a Japanese writer might use an image of, say, a tiger, which he never would have seen, but adopted from Chinese literature. The writing itself was kind of bloodless. Women were not allowed to study Chinese, but some of them (I'm talking about the aristocracy—a very small population) began writing in the Japanese vernacular; their writing contained an emotional truthfulness because the language itself belonged to the world they were living in. Talk about feminism! To me this was overwhelming: the idea that these women made such a huge impact because of how they were writing and because their work influenced all of Japanese literature afterward. It's been suggested that the author of "The Tosa Diary," Ki no Tsurayuki, had to write in a female persona in order

to express himself truthfully. Only in a woman's voice could the narrator express intense grief regarding the death of a child. It's an emotion and theme that holds together the various elements and transforms the diary entries into a narrative.

One can argue literature uses the imagination to get to the most truthful possible language, to discover the most revealing parts of ourselves and the world around us.

One of my favorite passages in "The Tosa Dairy" is when the narrator says she has to lie down on the bottom of the boat and sob. You're not going to have a man writing that, certainly not at that point. And, you just read that and think, "Yes, that's the grief a parent—male or female—would feel." You're right there on the floor with the speaker—it's just devastating.

I'm fascinated by how the diary gets caught up in the goings-on of the travelers, and yet how it ends with a soul-crushing lament for the narrator's loss. Ultimately the trip, or the poetry created during it, disappears in comparison to the narrator's sense of loss—ending with the line, "It really is best that I should tear up these papers at once."

It's very Buddhist to say, "This is not important—or it's too important—so I'm just going to rip it up." You see that and you realize it had to end there—it couldn't end with, "I could not forget her if I wished to." Tsurayuki is ending with the idea that everything is transient.

What did you think of the hierarchy of poetry the narrator creates within the text—was it a way for the author to create a critical text, through narrative?

One scholar has suggested the diary was intended primarily as "a book of poetics for the children of the nobility" and listed twenty topics concerning poetic theory that Tsurayuki mentioned in the course of the

work. Keene ultimately doesn't agree with that, and I don't either. The poetry and peoples' responses do add to the narrative and help to shape the "characters." Also the passengers have little else to do on board, which is part of the context for the poems: "I saw such and such, and I'll have to express myself," or, "I had to respond to the other poem because it would be rude not to, and it was a good poem." Poetry is naturally a part of the world we're involved in as we're reading. I should add a comment on Ki no Tsurayuki's importance to literary history, as one of the compilers (editors) of the first imperial anthology (*Kokinshu*), as the first to write an essay on Japanese aesthetics, and as one of the great masters of the waka (now called tanka).

The poems in "The Tosa Diary" also illustrate how the world is constantly being made and remade through voice.

Yes. It adds another dimension. And the diary speaks to the point that not everyone is going to write a great poem. Just because you spontaneously write a poem that meets all the requirements doesn't mean it's going to be praised.

I think there's more than a commentary on poetic craft or a social commentary at the heart of the diary—of course, both of those things are happening. It also feels like a commentary on desire. These people are on a dangerous journey, and the passengers are trying to engage the world through poetry just as the diary is trying to engage the world. There's something provisional about the recitation of poems, and even when the narrator is most critical of a poem and its author, it still feels like there's value in the effort of it. This seems foreign to American readers—we want a story with action and epiphanies, not a text that shows how mundane and fraught our lives are, and how we're trying in our own wonderful and interesting (and sometimes not so wonderful and not so interesting) ways to contend with that.

Ah—I just had an image of being on a cruise with Simon Cowell and trying to sing a song in front of him, then being devastated and feeling ashamed. But even his wounded contestants say, “Well, I’ll try again next year.”

A Susan Boyle character would fit perfectly into “The Tosa Diary”—she’d blow everyone away with her poem!

That’s why a great many of the poems in the diary have to be read in context—I mean, Susan Boyle blew Simon Cowell away partly because she’d never been to a beauty parlor outside her small town. On the other hand, some of the poems in “The Tosa Diary” have ended up in imperial anthologies lasting beyond even this text. There are also literary allusions when the woman recalls a poem and recites it to herself. If this were in a different context—at court—a poet would expect others to hear the echo and respond accordingly.

How did “The Tosa Diary” and the other Japanese forms you studied affect your own poetry?

Aside from the fictitious dimension of the Japanese poetic diaries, I’ll relate two aspects. First, there is a structural influence—using poems inside a narrative structure, what we would consider “hybridity.” Miner notes as “stylistic heightening” and Keene states, “Diaries composed in Japanese usually contain poems, not as embellishments of the texts but as ‘facts.’” The idea that the poems are the facts and the journal is less “factual” is extraordinary, don’t you think? The poetry also (in my Western mind, since English is my language) cuts across chronology and makes the text more spatial. All of a sudden there is a poetic allusion and we are swept into another dimension. Imagine a film with silent-movie spliced in. But in Japan, these devices are not experimental, they are part of the aesthetic. And “The Tosa Diary” was, to quote Keene again, “the first example of diary literature.” Secondly, I’ve learned from the ways

they created an almost musical composition. In "The Tosa Diary," for instance, you'll have a couple days where there's only one phrase: "Struck at sea." If I'm writing something that's several pages long—whether it's a more conventional poem, or a piece inspired by a Japanese form—I'll line my pages up and actually see what the pacing is, as if I'm looking at musical notation and can see crescendos as well as places where there's a rest. Then I'll see where different themes and elements are, and I'll start moving things around, trying to make it feel more organic. That's a way for me to tamper with what might have started out as an actual journal, such as a piece in my book *Narrow Road to the Interior* called "Trading Words." It's based on the 9/11 attacks and started out from a few notes I took during those weeks. But, the piece is completely, completely revised and moved around and added to—I'd say it's ninety percent fictitious, except of course for the actual event. I used craft lessons from Japanese literature, hopefully in service of emotion. Or, as one scholar has noted, writers of the genre arrange material in an artistic manner, rather than what a Western reader would consider realistic.

THE TOSA DIARY

Ki no Tsurayuki

It is said that diaries are kept by men, but I shall see if a woman cannot also keep one. It was about eight at night on the twenty-first of the Twelfth Month of that year¹ when we started on the trip for which I shall try to give my account. Leading our group was a certain man who had completed his four- or five-year term as chief official in that country province. He brought to an end all the usual affairs of office, and having received his certificate of replacement, he left his official residence and went down to the place where our party was to board its boat. There were many people to see us off, both those whom we knew and strangers. It is painful to part with those one has come to know over a period of years and, amid all the farewells, we found that the day had passed and night had fallen.

On the twenty-second we offered prayers to the gods that we might be able to land safely at Izumi. Fujiwara Tokizane presented us with "something for the horse," although knowing we were proceeding by ship.² With this the people of all ranks fell to heavy drinking, and it was surprising to see how they dissolved in their carousing by the seaside.

THE 23RD.

There is a person come to us called Yagi Yasunori who does not seem to be in government service, and yet he gave our party splendid gifts. Although people do not usually come to bid farewell to a departing official, it may have been due to a good feature in the character of the governor that some of the well-disposed residents of the province came to our first stopping place. So Yasunori came—I do not praise him for his presents but for the good will he showed.

THE 24TH.

The leader of a religious house came to offer parting presents. The people present—high and low, without distinction, even the young—drank a great deal, and in the general carousing those who could not even write a simple line were staggering crosses with their footprints.³

THE 25TH.

A letter of invitation came from the official residence of the new governor of the province. Our former governor and others in his entourage went off, staying all day and night. What with the entertainment they received, they were there until the new day had dawned.

THE 26TH.

It is said that there was a great feast at the new governor's residence and that everyone, down to the least retainer, was remembered with gifts. Chinese poems were composed and recited. The host, his guest, and others also composed Japanese poems for each other. It is not for a woman to record the Chinese poems.⁴ His Excellency the present governor composed the following Japanese poem.

I left the capital
With expectations of our meeting
And intimacy with you,
But I find that we have had to part
Even before a proper chance to meet.

Upon receiving the poem, our governor composed his reply.

White as linen,
The waves splash back and forth together
Far across the sea,
And just as I do now, you will return,
To meet me in the capital again.

There were poems composed by others, but none with any claim to style. After chatting about various matters, the two governors descended in close company to the garden where, taking each other by the hand, they talked in a convivial manner until the former governor left and the present went into his residence.

THE 27TH.

We set out by rowing from Ōtsu toward Urato. Amid all these things which I have related, I was filled with grief for my daughter. She had been born in the capital and had died suddenly in the province. Because of all the commotion of our departure, I have said nothing about this, but now that we are at last bound for the capital, I cannot help longing to have my dead girl alive again. The people with me wish her with us, too. I made some verses.⁵

The greatest sadness
Of thinking that now at last
We are bound for home
Is that there remains one person
Who will never know return.

And again, at another time,

I kept forgetting
That the child was dead and, asking,

As if she were alive,
"What can that girl be up to?"
I have fallen into a greater grief.

While I was reciting these verses to myself, we came to the Point of Kako, where the brothers of the new governor and many others came in a company bringing sake and other things. Our party went ashore and spoke with them of the unpleasantness of parting. As they revealed in coming to us, these people are the warmest hearted among all the people in the entourage of the new governor.

Amid this talk of unhappy farewells, our visitors brought forth a poem together. As the proverb says, "Even a large fishing net can be carried by many people," and so they accompanied us down to the water's edge with an "All together there, let's go, let's go!" and the poem.

Regretting that you leave,
And wondering if you might not stay,
We come in a swarm
Like faithful mallards among the reeds
To hold our fellows back with us.

One of our group, being greatly affected by their poem, composed a reply.

So deep the ocean,
That one may plunge in it a pole
And not know its reaches;
Even so great a depth of heart
Is that which we have seen in you.

As these verses were being said, the captain of our ship, a man lacking in warmth and far gone with sake, shouted out, "The tide has come in—the wind will be rising, too!" There was nothing for us to do but board the

ship again. At this, some of the people recited alongside the boat Chinese poems appropriate to the occasion. There was also present a certain man from the west country who nonetheless recited some verses from songs of the eastern provinces. Upon hearing the singing, someone praised it highly: "With such singing, the dust on the beams of our cabin will dance as it did for the songs of Yü Kung, and the very clouds will linger as they did for the singing of Ch'in Ch'ing."

We stop tonight at Urato. Fujiwara Tokizane, Tachibana Suehira, and others of this province are following separately.

THE 28TH.

We rowed out from Urato, bound for Ōminato. As we were about to set out, Yamaguchi Chimine, the son of a governor in former times, brought us sake and many delicacies. We put them on the boat and enjoyed them on the way.

THE 29TH.

We are stopping at Ōminato. The provincial medical officer has come bringing sake and with it spiced sake and sake flavoring for New Year's celebrations. It seems to be done out of personal kindness.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

We are still in the same harbor. One of our people, thinking that we had just this one night to get ready the New Year's sake flavoring, cut it up in the house erected on the deck. But the wind came in a gust, and the

things fell into the sea, and we were unable to drink it after all. Since this is a province lacking such things, we have none of the special foods of the season. More than that, we are not even prepared to deal with them and have only some rather tired Tosa trout to put to our lips. What must those trout be thinking as they meet with such an affectionate gesture?

Everyone is saying, "The capital is all I can think about today. What must the small houses there look like, with the decorations of sacred rope and the mullet or holly hanging from it?"

THE 2ND.

We are still harbored at Ōminato. The ecclesiastical official has presented us with foodstuffs and sake.

THE 3RD.

We are still in the same place. I wonder if the wind and waves are not thinking, "We would be happy if you would stay here a little longer." The delay is very unpleasant to us all.

THE 4TH.

Since the wind is blowing high, we are unable to set out. Masatsura⁶ has presented us with sake and other delicacies. In such circumstances as ours it is very trying always to be receiving gifts and never having anything to return but thanks. We simply have nothing proper to give, and so although we have become—ever so wealthy—we feel rather cheap.

THE 5TH.

Since the wind has not gone down, we remain in the same place. The local people have been unfailing in their visits.

THE 6TH.

Our situation is the same as yesterday.

It is now the seventh and we remain in this harbor. Today I thought about the white horses shown in the capital⁷ at this season and found that the thought depressed me. The only white things to be seen are the waves on the sea.

While I was thinking over such matters a long chest was delivered from a moor called "The Pond," which adjoins the house of a provincial official. Although it had such a name, there were not the usual pond carp in the chest but parti-colored carp, rice, seafood, and other fine delicacies. Among them the most remarkable were young shoots, which reminded me that today is the day for gathering them. They came with a poem which read:

Because miscanthus
Grows rampant upon the moorfields,
These are young shoots
That we have gathered from a "Pond"
Where deep water is never to be found.

The poem is clever enough. "The Pond" is a place name for a locality to which a lady of distinguished family from the capital is said to have accompanied her husband to live.

Because the various contents of the chest were distributed to all the people of the ship, even to the young, people stuffed themselves with food, and

the menials among the crew beat their bellies in contentment till the ocean must have been astonished and the waves led to rise.

So, a good deal has been happening all this while. Today a strange person bearing a luncheon cabinet—his name slips my mind, but I shall recall it in a moment—this man came on purpose to recite a poem. After talking for some time, he read out a poem of address, speaking with some anxiety: "The waves really are running high!" His verses went:

The white waves
That will rise before you on the sea
Cry with loud voices,
But I who am left behind you
Shout louder far than they.

Such was his poem! He has recited it in a very loud voice—and just how can such verses compare with the good things he brought? Although people pretended to praise the strange presentation of the poem, no one composed a reply. There were many present who might have made a poem, but not one answered his. All anyone did was praise his verses and keep on eating till darkness fell, and so our poet said, "Don't expect me to wait forever!"

There was a young child of someone on the ship, who said rather bashfully, "Well, I'll give a poem in reply." We were all astonished but said, "Now that's very nice. Can you really make a poem? If you can, well, go right ahead." The child then asked, "Has he said he would leave? If he would have waited I would have recited a poem." Someone looked for our poet but, probably because it had grown so late, the man had already gone off after all. But being curious, the person asked the child, "What was the poem that you were going to speak?" Not unnaturally, the child was too shy to tell us, but after being pressed she spoke her verses.

The river of tears
Upon the sleeves of us who go
And you who stay
just swells up upon its banks
And makes them wetter all the time!

Surely the child acquitted herself well. It may be because she is so attractive, but she exceeded my expectations. Someone with her told her, "A child's poem is bound to have some faults. If you get some big person to help you, the results would really be nice. However it turns out, we shall send it to the man if we get a good chance to." Saying that, he appeared to copy down the poem.

THE 8TH.

Something untoward has prevented our departure, and so we remain in the same harbor. Tonight the moon is sinking into the sea. Seeing it do so, I find that verses by Lord Narihira⁸ come to mind: "I wish the mountaintop would flee the moon / And delay the darkening of its light." If he had composed his poem by this seaside, might he not have written instead, "I wish the waves would rise so high / As to prevent the moon from sinking in the sea?" Alluding to Narihira's verses, someone composed a poem which went, I believe:

As I look on the moon,
Shining in its flowing across the sky,
I see that the port mouth
Where the starry River of Heaven flows
Is, like that of other streams, the sea.

Early in the morning on the ninth we left Ōminato, rowing on toward Naha harbor as our next stopping place. Among the many, many people

who came in succession to see us off and who said that they would accompany us just to the border of the province, there were Fujiwara Tokizane, Tachibana Suehira, Hasebe Yukimasa, and others. Since the day the former governor left his official residence, these men have devotedly followed us here and there, wherever we have gone. They are men warmly attached to the governor, with a depth of feeling not exceeded even by the depths of this sea.

From this harbor we shall at last be rowing on the open sea. It was for this final parting that those who followed us came to say farewell. Now as we row on, the people standing on the shore have grown remote, and the people aboard the ship have grown out of sight of those on land. They on the shore no doubt have things they wish to say to us, and we on the ship have words we would like to speak to them. It is no use. I did, however, murmur a poem to myself and find I had to leave it at that.

It is my heart alone,
Filled with distant thoughts of them,
Which may cross the open sea,
But since a letter cannot walk the waves,
How can they know what I would say?

We now pass the pine grove on the coast of Uta. I cannot judge how many trees there must be or how many centuries they have stood there. During all this time, how the waves must have splashed on the roots of the trees, and the cranes have come and gone in its branches! It is impossible merely to look upon the splendor of this scenery,⁹ and someone composed a poem something like this:

Gazing all about,
One can but believe the cranes
Have been companions

Of the pine trees upon whose tops
They have nested through the ages.

To one looking upon the place itself, the poem falls far short of capturing the beauty of the scene.

I kept my attention on the beautiful sight ashore, and as the ship rowed on, the mountains, the sea, all darkened as night fell. One could not distinguish north from south and could only entrust the weather to the captain's understanding. Even a man unaccustomed to a sea voyage at night must find it disheartening. For a woman it was worse, nothing to do but hold one's head against the floor down in the boat and weep aloud. While I was so dejected, the men of the ship or the captain fell to singing boat songs till it could scarcely be borne. Two of the songs, one for a young wife and another for a peasant, went as follows:

In the spring fields I cried aloud in pain—
The young pampas grass had cut, had cut my hands;
I managed at last to pluck some shoots,
And shall I take them to my parents?
Will my mother-in-law make them a meal?
And how can I get home!

I wish I had caught the boy I met last night—
I'll get his money, somehow;
He told me a lie,
He bought some things on promise,
But he doesn't bring the money,
He doesn't even come.

There were many songs besides these, but I shall not set them down. I heard people laughing over them, and although the sea was very rough, I

felt somehow more at ease. We kept on in this way until we reached the harbor. An old man and an old woman in our group were not well and, unable to eat, had to keep to their pillows.

THE 10TH.

We spent the day in Naha harbor.

THE 11TH.

At dawn the boat set out for Murotsu. Since all of us were abed, we were unable to judge the appearance of the sea. But by the light of the moon we were able to make out our directions. As time passed, day broke into full light; I washed up, and by the time I had done the usual things of the morning, it was noon. Just then we came upon Hane. Since it means "wings," a young child asked, "Does this place called Hane look like bird's wings?" It was just the sort of thing a child might ask, and people were greatly amused. At this another child, a girl, composed a poem.

If it were only true,
If the place would suit its name
And provide us wings,
Then we could climb upon the bird—
Oh, to fly to the capital and home!

When the child inquired about this place called Hane, my dead girl came at once to mind; in fact, when is it that I forget her? Even more today, in my grief for my child I think how our family is fewer in number than when we set out from the capital. And when I recalled the old poem¹⁰ with its verses about the geese returning north—"They have lost

one from their number / As they wing back to their home"—I composed some verses.

Throughout this life,
How much there is gives cause for grief,
But the suffering
That exceeds all other suffering
Is to love and lose the child one loves.

When this was finished, I recited it over and over to myself. Truly...

THE 12TH.

It does not rain, though the sky is threatening. The ship with Funtoki and Koremichi was delayed and separated from ours, but they have come to Murotsu by way of Narashizu.

Dawn on the thirteenth—a very light rain is falling. After a short time it has stopped. A number of us women said that we wished for the opportunity to bathe. We left the ship and went ashore for a suitable place. While gazing upon the sea, I thought of a poem.

White clouds and whitecaps,
Both appear like foaming waves;
Oh, for fisherfolk—
Surely they can give me answer,
Which are the white waves of the sea?

Because it is now after the tenth of the month, the moon is bright. Since the day we first boarded the ship, I have been unable to wear my lovely dark red robe. That must not be done, I am told, out of danger

of attracting the god of the sea. Whatever the god of the sea may feel about women and clothes," and whether it is all right or not, when I was bathing along the shore in a place scarcely screened by reeds, I lifted the skirt of my robe to the point of revealing my legs, and more that ought not to be seen.

THE 14TH.

Because rain has been falling since daybreak, we have remained in the same harbor. This is a day of fast from meat for the governor, but without the proper fast foods on the boat, he is fasting for only half a day. Not having ready money, he exchanged rice for sea bream caught yesterday by the captain of the ship, and after his fast fell to eating the fish. There were others who had to do such things on fast days. The captain has come again with bream, and we exchange now rice, now sake for the food. He is not displeased with the exchange.

THE 15TH.

We have no red beans to boil for January tonic. What a pity...Now with the weather bad again today, it is more than twenty days since we began to creep along in this boat. Because the days pass by so fruitlessly, we only look about absentmindedly on the sea. A young girl composed a poem.

The wind may rise,
So do the waves, and so they fall
With the falling wind;
They must be loving comrades,
The blowing wind and ceaseless waves.

Although it was the sort of undistinguished thing a child might write, it was apt enough for our situation.

THE 16TH.

Since the wind and waves have not subsided, we remain in the same place. I keep thinking that if only the sea would quiet, we could cross over to that place called Misaki. But the wind and waves are not likely to settle down very quickly. Looking at the surging waves—

It has been claimed
That this is so warm a province
That frost never falls,
But still among the stormy waves
There falls the foaming snow.

So, today is the twenty-fifth day since we boarded the ship.

THE 17TH.

The dark clouds have at last cleared, and at a most lovely time just before dawn we set out rowing from the harbor. At this moment the region above the clouds and the depth of the sea appeared to shimmer together. It was probably a sight like this that led that man of ancient times to say, "The oar pierces the moon reflected on the waves, and the boat rests upon the sky shining on the sea."² But I am not certain that I heard or remember the quotation aright. Someone composed a poem along these lines.

Our ship is rowing
Upon the surface of the moon

Lying in the waters,
And that which catches back our oars
Must be the laurel growing in the moon.

Hearing this, one of us composed another poem.

The moon shines there,
Deep among the waves that brighten
With a celestial light,
And as I row across the heavens
I feel lost in all that great expanse.

As this was being said, it gradually became full day. And then suddenly the sailors cried out: "Black clouds have come up. There's sure to be a storm! The boat must turn back!" So we turned back, and on our way the rain began to fall. What a miserable time!

THE 18TH.

So, we are in the same harbor again. They are unable to take the boat out, because the sea has grown so rough. The harbor area itself is attractive as far as one can see. In this painful period of waiting to get home, however, it is impossible to appreciate the scene. Perhaps for a diversion, the men seem to have taken to reciting Chinese poems. Since we must somehow put up with the fact that the ship cannot set out, someone composed a poem.

With a great banging
The waves crowd in upon the shore,
Which lies foaming white
With a snow that always falls
No matter what the month or year.

As the language shows, this poem was made by someone who does not usually compose verses. Someone else composed a poem.

In the great waves
Driven by the wind upon the shore,
White flowers bloom
Of a kind that neither the warbler
Nor the spring could say it knew.

When he heard these two poems, the old man who is the leader of us passengers thought them to be rather interesting, and to beguile the great impatience we have all felt since last month, he too composed a poem.

The ceaseless wind
That drives the waves upon the shore
And churns them white
Seemed to have deceived the lookers-on,
Who think the foam is snow or flowers.

While people were passing this or that judgment upon these poems, one person who had been listening most intently composed some verse himself. The poem was a misshapen thing, with too many syllables in the lines. At this no one was able to repress laughter. The person who composed it, however, was extremely irritated and full of complaint. Yet it was the kind of thing one could not pronounce aloud, and if one tried to set it down, it made no difference—one could still not parse it. If today it is hard to repeat the poem, what would it be like at some later time?

THE 19TH.

Because of bad weather, the boat is unable to set out.

THE 20TH.

With conditions like yesterday, the boat cannot leave. Everyone is worried over the situation and moping about. It is a terrible thing to have the days go by so slowly, and when I try to count the days that have passed, whether twenty or thirty, it is like breaking fingers in the count. Which only makes matters worse.

I am having great difficulty sleeping. The moon is in its twentieth night. There are no hills or mountains whose rim it might rise above, as it does in the capital, so it just seems to come out of the sea. It must have been just this kind of moon from the sea that, ages ago, was seen by Abe no Nakamaro from the coast of China. When he was returning to this country, at the place where he was to board the ship the men of that country gave him a farewell banquet and, in regret of his departure, composed proper Chinese poems and performed other things for him. Perhaps because they had not been able to express their reluctance to part adequately, he stayed with them till the twentieth night of the moon. His moon, too, must have risen from the sea. It was on looking at it that Lord Nakamaro said, "In our country we have composed poems since the age of the gods. The gods themselves have done so, and now people of whatever rank make poems of this kind to show their regret at parting and to express their joys or their sorrows." Telling them of this, he composed the following poem.

I cast my eyes
Wide across the blue plains of the sea
Brilliant with a moon—
Can it be the one that in far Kasuga
Rises over the hilltop of Mikasa?¹³

So it went. The men of that country were unable to appreciate it, but when the chief features of its meaning were written in Chinese and sketched in outline, and when they had had it interpreted for them, they were able to judge its feeling and appreciated it to an extent unforeseen. China and

this country have different languages, but since the radiance of the moon is the same for both, men's feelings about it must surely be the same. The recollections of that distant age led to a poem.

This is the very moon
That we see upon the mountain's rim
In the capital,
But here the moon arises from the waves
And back into the waves it sets.

THE 21ST.

About six o'clock in the morning the boat set out at last.

The boats of our fellow travelers also left. As I looked at the scene of the boats on the water, it was as though the leaves of autumnal trees had scattered in the early spring sea. Was it because of the strength of our unceasing prayers? At all events, the wind did not blow, and we rowed out in fine weather. At this time a child whom we had asked to serve our group sang a boat song.

Always I look back
Toward my native place,
To where my parents are,
And how can I get home?

His song touched the feelings of us all. As he was singing and the boat bore on, we passed a place where dark-colored birds were gathered upon the tops of rocks along the coast, while the waves shattered white at their base. It was as the captain said: "The white waves are heading where the black birds roost." There was nothing very special about his words, but at

the time they sounded like the verse of a poem. Since it was not the sort of thing one would expect a sea captain to say, it caught one's attention.

As we were bearing on during these remarks, our leader was looking out upon the waves. All the way from Tosa he had been saying that we were in danger of encountering pirates. The sea is a terrifying element to one with such apprehensions, and his hair has all gone white as a result. It is the sea that has made him age to seventy or eighty.

On his head a snow,
On the rocky coast white waves
Falling constantly—
Tell me, which of those is whiter,
You guardian of these isles.

Captain, you should repeat this poem to the guardian of the isles!

THE 22ND.

We are heading from the harbor where we stopped last night to another. The mountains can be seen in the distance. There was a boy of about eight—he looks younger than his real age—who saw that as the ship rowed onward the mountains also seemed to move. He thought it very strange and made some verses.

As I look out
From the ship that rows along,
With their sloping sides
The mountains themselves move along;
But do the pines upon them know?

Such was his poem, and as the composition of a child it was very appropriate.

Today, with the roughness of the sea, it is as though snow is falling on the beach and wave flowers are blossoming. Someone made a poem.

All the ear can hear
Is the single sound of waves,
But to see their color
—Of snow, or is it blossoms?
Brings confusion to one's eyes.

THE 23RD.

The sun was shining, but afterwards the sky clouded over. Since there is danger of pirates in this vicinity, we prayed to the gods and the Buddha.

THE 24TH.

We are in the same place as yesterday.

THE 25TH.

Since the captain and sailors say that a north wind is unfavorable,¹⁴ they will not set forth. All that one hears is that pirates will come after us.

THE 26TH.

Whether or not it is true, it is said that pirates were looking for us, and therefore about midnight the boat slipped out in the dark. As we rowed on our way, we came to the place of supplication for safety.¹⁵ On the captain's order, the sacred offering of shredded cloth¹⁶ was raised up. As it fell to the east, the captain spoke the words of offering: "May the boat speed on in the direction this offering has fallen." With these words he performed the rite. Hearing what he had said, a girl made some verses.

O wind that blew
The offering at the place of supplication
To the god that guards
Our passage on the ocean paths,
Blow steadily till we reach our home.

Since the condition of the wind was favorable at this time, the captain, with great swaggering, had the sail raised. He was mightily pleased. When we heard the sound inside our quarters, the children and the older women, whose thoughts were only about getting home, rejoiced greatly. Among the group was one called the Old Woman of Awaji, who composed a poem.

Now that the wind has risen,
The sound of hands clattering up a sail
To speed on our ship
Is one that brings a flutter to our hearts
And makes us strike our hands for joy.

We prayed that we might continue in fair weather.

THE 27TH.

With the wind too high, the seas have grown rough and our boat cannot set out. Everyone is extremely dejected. Hearing that as an amusement the men were reciting Chinese verses, including, "As I gaze upon the sun, the capital seems to grow more and more remote," a woman who had understood the gist of the line made a poem.

Although the sun
That should be so far away is seen
Hard by the clouds,
The capital to which I would return
Lies remote upon our distant road.

The wind bléw hard all day. I snapped my fingers in irritation and fell asleep.

THE 28TH.

Throughout the night rain fell unceasingly. This morning, too.

THE 29TH.

The boat has set out again. The sun is shining gloriously and the boat rows along smartly. Observing that my nails have grown extremely long, and counting the days, I discovered that today is the Day of the Rat; thinking that to clip them would be unpropitious, I did not do so. Since it is January, I mentioned the Festival of the Day of the Rat¹⁷ in the capital. "If only we had just a little pine tree for the occasion," I said. But since we are on the sea, what good would that do? A certain woman showed us a poem she had written.

It avails us little
But today is the Festival of the Rat—
If a fisherwoman,
I would have at least a celebration
In cutting the poor pine weeds of the sea.¹⁸

What can one say in favor of a poem on the Festival of the Rat—at sea?
Another person recited a poem.

This is just the time,
But I shall not go out to pick
The young shoots of the day,
Because the waters that we row across
Are far from being the fields of Kasuga.

We kept rowing on while the poem was being recited. The ship was steered by a place of exceptional beauty. When I asked, "What place is this?" the answer was, "The Tosa Station." A woman on the ship who had lived in former days in yet another place called Tosa said, "In the past I lived for a time in a place with the same name! What an odd feeling." And I composed a poem.

For how long was it
That I lived once in a distant place
That bore this very name?
It moves the heart to think that now
The waves of Tosa wash upon the ship.

THE 30TH.

There is no rain, and the wind is still. Hearing that pirates do not venture out at night, we set forth about midnight and crossed to the Whirlpool of Awa. Since it was the middle of the night, we could not distinguish north from south. Men and women alike we prayed desperately to the gods and the Buddha and at last passed through the whirlpool. We went by Nushima in the early dawn and then crossed past Tanagawa. Making as much haste as possible, we arrived at the Offing of Izumi. Today the ocean is so still as to have nothing resembling waves. It seems that we have received the favor of the gods and the Buddha.

Today, on counting the number of days since we boarded ship, I see that it has been thirty-nine. Since we have now come to Izumi province, there is no longer danger from pirates.

SECOND MONTH. THE 1ST.

It rained throughout the morning. The sky having cleared about noon, we rowed out along the Offing of Nada. Like yesterday, there is neither wind nor rain at sea. We are passing the pine groves of Kurosaki: since the name means "Black Point," that is one color. The color of the pines is green. The waves upon the coast are like snow, and the seashells are scarlet. Only yellow is lacking from the Five Shades. Today we have begun to pull a dragnet from a place called Hako Bay. While we are proceeding in this fashion, someone made a poem about this "Box Bay."

Fit for a jeweled comb,
The box of Hako where the bay waves
Do not rise upon the sea—
Surely all would think on such a day
The sea a mirror fit for such a box.

The response of our leader to the scene was to sigh, "To think that it is the Second Month already..." There seemed to be no interruption to the misery of travel, and so from what seemed deep feeling he added the following poem:

The boat goes on,
The spring day stretches out as long
As the dragnet pulled behind,
And somehow I have managed to pull out
Some forty or fifty dragging days at sea.

Someone who had heard the leader whispered: "Now listen to that—it's no better than prose. He comes out with some fumbling words and thinks himself a very clever poet. Of course he might be offended if he heard what we think." The whispering continued for a time and then broke off.

Because the wind suddenly rose and the waves grew rough, we stopped for mooring.

THE 2ND.

The wind and rain are increasing. Through the day and through the night we prayed to the gods and the Buddha.

THE 3RD.

With the condition of the sea the same as yesterday, the boat cannot set out. With no letup to the wind, the surf breaks in on the shore and then flows back. I have set down a poem about this.

Twisting up hemp,
I spin a thread that has no use;
It is because the tears
Whose beads fall heavily each day
Are not such jewels as might be strung.

With matters in this state, night has come.

THE 4TH.

The captain said, "The condition of the wind and the sky is extremely unfavorable," so that it has not been possible to put out the boat. All the same, neither the wind nor the waves rose so high. This captain really seems unable to tell anything about the weather. On the shore of this harbor there are many beautiful little shells and pebbles. For all their beauty, because they are just the sort of thing she would have liked to gather, they remind me of my little girl who has passed away. I made a poem.

Beating upon the shore,
O waves, I wish that you would bring
Shells of forgetfulness
That I might pick a shell of comfort
From the heavy thoughts of her I love.

When I spoke the poem, there was one with us who was unable to remain silent and made a poem on the sufferings of our voyage.

Shells of forgetfulness—
Not they the things I shall take up,
But pretty pebbles

To remind me of a precious child,
To be a souvenir of her I loved.

No doubt a parent becomes almost a distraught child in grieving for her daughter, and someone may well say, "The girl could not have been such an incomparable treasure." For all that, the proverb is true: "A lost child is always lovely." So it goes. The day has passed at the same place, and a woman with us composed a poem:

If Izumi province
Were a spring and not a name alone,
My dipping hand
Would feel the cold and not be empty
As the days that pass by on these shores.

THE 5TH.

Today at long last we leave the Offing of Izumi for the harbor at Ozu. The pine grove stretches off and off along the land. Everyone thought the endless sight depressing and I therefore composed a poem.

Although we move,
Still we seem as endless in our motion
As a spinning wife,
Spinning the thread of the Ozu shore
Where the endless pine groves stretch.

As I repeated this to myself, our leader pressed the captain: "Let's hurry and row out in this fine weather!" The captain told his men: "We have our orders. Let us make haste with the ship. Pull hard on the towrope,

before the morning calm is over, and the wind blows from the north." These words, which fell into the cadence of a poem, were the very words the captain spoke. Of course he had no idea that he had spoken anything like a poem. On hearing him, I said, "This sounds strangely like a poem." Copying down the words, I found that they really fit into the meter of a poem.

Throughout the day we prayed, "Let the waves be still today," and the sea was calm. Just now we passed an area where gulls had gathered and were cavorting. Because this was a sign that we were approaching the main island and nearing the capital, a child composed a poem in a burst of joy.

Thanks to our prayers,
It seemed there was a letup in the wind—
But all in vain,
Because the very gulls themselves
Alight like waves so white upon the beach.

As this was being said, we rowed on until we came to a place called Ishizu, which had lovely pine groves. The shoreline lay stretched out in the distance, and we continued along it to the coast of Sumiyoshi.¹⁹ Someone made a poem.

Now that I see them,
I have come to understand myself.
Ages old the pines
And green upon the Sumi Inlet,
But I before them white with years.

Hearing this, one like myself the mother of a dead girl, naturally found it impossible to forget her, even for part of a day. My poem:

O take our ship
To rest upon the beach of Sumiyoshi!
For I would like to pick
The grasses of forgetfulness to see
If they can prove the promise of their name.

My intention was not that I should utterly forget, but that just for a moment I might rest my aching heart and then return with renewed strength for loving her.

As I was whispering this poem, lost in my thoughts while gazing out from the ship, the wind suddenly blew up. Although the crew rowed and rowed, the stern of the ship only dipped and bobbed till with the danger it seemed that we would be swallowed by the sea. The captain said, "The great god of Sumiyoshi is like other gods. Surely there is something he desires"—all this being pronounced in a mincing, would-be fashionable voice. "Someone present him with sacred shredded cloth," he ordered. The offering was given as he said. In spite of the presentation, the wind did not abate at all; on the contrary, the gale rose and the waves grew yet rougher. At this the captain declared, "If the god's heart is unstirred, the ship will not stir, either. It seems we have got to present him with something that suits him." He continued, "There's nothing else to be done. As they say, we have two good eyes, but—we will offer him one mirror." As he said this, he threw a valuable mirror into the sea.²⁰ It was a great loss. But even as it was done, the sea became as smooth as the surface of a mirror, leading someone to compose a poem.

Mighty he is,
The god whose heart was raging
With the wild sea,
Yet when we gave the mirror to the waves,
They and his heart reflected calm.

What an experience it was....

The things associated with this place—the calm sea of Sumiyoshi, the grasses of forgetfulness of care, and the elegant princess pines of the shore—the god resembles none of them. It was plain to see that the god's desire was reflected in that mirror and that the mind of the captain understood that of the god.

THE 6TH.

We went past the boundary marker of the harbor²¹ and, arriving after so long at Naniwa,²² we started into the mouth of the Yodo River. Without exception everyone, including the old men and women, clapped their hands about their heads for joy. Hearing that we had at last come in from the sea, the Old Woman of Awaji, who had suffered so much from seasickness throughout the voyage, in her joy raised her head from where she had been lying on the floor of the ship and made a poem.

With downcast heart,
I asked, how long, how long this trip,
And now at Naniwa
Our ship has come at last from open sea,
Cutting its way through reeds of the lagoon.

Since she was the last person one would expect to compose such a poem, the people on the boat greeted her poem with surprise. Among them hearing the poem was our leader who, although troubled by his illness, said with great consideration, "Since your face is so drawn by seasickness, we had not thought you could make so good a poem."

THE 7TH.

As we entered the mouth of the river today and started upstream, the water became very shallow. What a situation! It was next to impossible for the boat to make headway. While this was happening, our leader, who is a sick man, decided that since the Old Woman of Awaji had composed a poem and since we were nearing the capital, he might compose one, too. He did so in spite of the fact that he has never known much of anything about so refined an occupation as poetry, and with considerable effort he brought out a most peculiar poem.²³

Here we are, we are,
But because the riverway upstream
Is grown too shallow,
Neither the boat nor I myself
Can call this a day free from pain.

That is the sort of poem a person would compose because he is ill. Since one poem was not enough to satisfy his feelings, there was another.

That keeping
Our ship from speeding as I like
Is that in its bed
The water of the stream is shallow,
And shallow hearted, too, to me.

It appears that he made this poem because he was unable to contain his joy at nearing the capital. But the poems were clumsier than that of the Old Woman of Awaji. He regretted his poetic efforts. "It's exasperating!" he said. "It would have been better if I had not made the poems." Meanwhile night had come on, and I soon fell asleep.

THE 8TH.

It is only with great difficulty that we have been able to move upstream and to come for a stop at a place called the Meadow of Torikai. This evening our leader had an outbreak of his chronic illness and suffered greatly. Someone brought fresh fish, and we gave rice in return. The men seem to be whispering among themselves about it. "To get fresh fish for rice is to catch a whale with a shrimp," said one of them. But such things happen everywhere. Since today is a fast day for us, it is: no fish.

THE 9TH.

Because we were so impatient, we set forth before dawn, but no matter how hard the boat was towed, what with the lack of water in the river, we barely scraped along. Creeping onward, we came to a place called the Fork of Wada, where we ordered rice, fish, and other things for breaking fast.

These things done, our boat was towed farther upstream, and as we went along we were looking upon a place called the Palace of Nagisa. When one thinks of former times, this palace has a special charm. On a hill to the rear of it there is a stand of pines, and plum trees were in blossom in the central garden. While we were there, someone said, "This was a famous place in former days. It is the place where the Commander of the Horse Guards,²⁴ Ariwara Narihira, enjoyed the company of Prince Koretaka and composed his poem:

If in this world
There ever was a time when cherry trees
Failed in the blossoming,
Then the responsive hearts of men
Might answer to a tranquil spring.²⁵

One person with us today composed a poem appropriate to the location.

Here are the pine trees
That have passed through countless ages;
Still the breezes blow
Rustling through them with a voice
Unchanged in coolness from the past.

Another person made a poem.

Loved by the Prince,
And standing at a palace ages old,
The flowering plum
Still sends forth its faithful odor,
The very fragrance of the past.

As this was being recited, we continued upstream in great happiness at nearing the capital.

Among those on the boat were a number of people who had had children born to them during service in Tosa, although none but me had taken a child along. At one place where the boat was moored today, these parents took their children in their arms, lifting them on and off the boat. Seeing this, I thought with unrelieved heartache of my dead girl.

Those who had none
When we went down to the province
Now return with children,
While I who had one had her die
And now come home with only grief.

Saying this, I fell to weeping. And what would be her father's thoughts if he heard my verses? I do not set down these words, nor did I compose the poem, out of mere love of writing.²⁶ Surely both in China and in Japan art is that which is created when we are unable to suppress our feelings.

Tonight we stopped at a place called Udonō.

THE 10TH.

Today being ominous, we did not continue the journey.

THE 11TH.

After raining a little, it has stopped. As we started upstream I noticed that toward the east there lay a line of low stretched hills. When I inquired about this of someone, I was told that it was the Shrine of Yawata. When we heard we had come so close to the capital, we were overjoyed and gave prayers of thanks. The Bridge of Yamazaki²⁷ came into view and at this our joy was unbounded. Here, near Sōō Temple, our boat was stopped and there were various consultations. The willows grow in profusion on the banks near this temple. Seeing the reflection of the willows deep in the stream, someone made a poem.

The rippling waves
Flow softly in their rich design.
Are they not woven
From the threads in this reflection
Of fine green willows on the shore?

THE 12TH.

We are stopping in Yamazaki.

THE 13TH.

Still at Yamazaki.

THE 14TH.

It is raining. Men have been sent to the capital for carts.

THE 15TH.

The carts have come. Glad to be free of the constrictions of the boat, we have left it for a certain person's house. At this house we had, what pleased us greatly, excellent and proper food. With so generous a host and such fine hospitality, the past weeks seem even more distasteful. We exchanged numerous gifts. The manners of our hosts are faultless.

THE 16TH.

At dusk today we started for the capital, and as we went I observed that neither the shop sign of little boxes in Yamazaki nor that of the great hook in Magari had changed.²⁸ But people seemed to wonder whether the disposition of the merchants had altered for the better.

As we were proceeding toward the capital, one person came to Shimasaka²⁹ to bid us welcome. This was an act that was not required of him. Indeed

there were many more people who did this or that for us when we came back than those who did things for us as we left. We presented gifts in return to these people.

We had decided to enter the capital after dark,³⁰ and were in no great hurry. As we went slowly along the moon rose and we crossed the Katsura River to the capital in moonlight. People were talking about the river. "Since it is not like the changeable Asuka River,³¹ its depths and shallows are just where they were before." And another person recited a poem.

From the wide heavens,
The laurel-figured moon shines down,
On the Katsura River,
And even its radiance is unchanged,
Brightening the very bottom of the stream.

Another person recited a poem.

The Katsura River—
All this time as distant in my mind
As high floating clouds,
But though your waves have wet my sleeves,
Have I not crossed at last to home?

Yet another person composed a poem.

The Katsura River
Cannot be said to flow upon a course
Taken through my heart,
But it is flowing in depths the same
As the depths of happiness I feel.

Just as our joy for the capital grew excessive, so too the number of poems was over many to set down. It had now become dark, and we were unable to see the various places we longed to. Yet how good it is to be back in the capital!

Arriving at our house and entering the gate, we could see everything clearly in the bright moonlight. All the same, even though we had heard something of it, we found the house fallen in and dilapidated beyond words. The heart of the person to whom we had entrusted the house must have gone to ruin, too. There is after all the familiar inner hedge—it must be the same house that we entrusted with such hope while we were away. It was because of such hopes that we had sent back gifts at every opportunity. In spite of all, I restrained our people from saying, “What a mess this is—hadn’t we sent gifts all the time?” Although the attitude of our manager was most distasteful, we shall pay him thanks.

There is one place where water has collected like a pond. There are even new pines growing at its edge. In the five or six years that we were away, centuries seem to have transpired here. Half the property has disappeared, and everything is jumbled with new growth. Since for the most part things are in ruin, people are saying, “What a pity it all is.”

Innumerable feelings press upon me and among them the dearest are thoughts of the girl who was born in this house. It is impossible to say how broken-hearted I am that she has not returned with us. Those who were with us on the boat now have children swarming about and making commotion. My unhappiness seemed to find no relief amid all this bustle, so I composed a poem I did not tell to the others.

She was born here,
And although she did not return,
When back in this house

I look upon the little pines grown here
With grief for one who grows no more.

Since I still had not exhausted my feelings, I wrote down another poem.

The girl I daily saw—
If she might have lived like pine trees
Through the centuries,
Why should she have left in that far place
On the distant parting of eternity?

I could not forget her if I wished to, and there are so many other reasons
for being unhappy that I cannot exhaust them by setting them down. It
really is best that I should tear up these papers and end at once.

Translated from the Japanese by Earl Roy Miner.

NOTES

- 1 It was A.D. 934 when Tsurayuki left Tosa to return to the capital. The twelfth month of the lunar calendar is January by the solar. See n. 7.
- 2 Tsurayuki uses the idiomatic phrase, *uma no hanamuke*, "turning of the horse's nose," in a wordplay upon boat travel. The phrase recurs in the diary, being used later to mean parting gifts.
- 3 In Japanese the point is that those illiterates who could not draw the single horizontal line for the number one are so drunk that their staggering feet draw the crossed lines for ten.
- 4 Women usually did not learn Chinese, though some braved social stigma to do so. Men commonly kept diaries in Chinese, a fact related to the first sentence of the diary.
- 5 The narrator can only mean she wrote the verses herself although, like many poems in the diary, this is attributed to *aru hito*, "a certain person." One theory holds that all poems so designated are meant to be by Tsurayuki, the "former governor" of the diary. But that confuses biography and fiction.
- 6 It is unknown whether Masatsura or the other people mentioned by name in the diary are real or fictional. The specification of names helps, however, to give an air of verisimilitude.
- 7 The imperial showing of white horses and the gathering of young shoots were events associated with the New Year in the capital. Records suggest that the emperor did in fact order young shoots picked on the seventh day of the month of 734, as is suggested in the next paragraph. By the present calendar it would be mid-February, which accounts for the seemingly early appearance of flowers in the diary.
- 8 Ariwara Narihira (825-880), one of the poets Tsurayuki singles out for notice in the preface to the *Kokinshū*, appears again later in the diary. See n. 24.
- 9 The idea that poetry comes from irrepressible feelings and that normal human beings wish to express their feelings in verse is a critical tenet of Tsurayuki in the preface to the *Kokinshū* and is repeated effectively several times in the diary.

- 10 A much-liked anonymous allegory by a woman who had lost her husband in a province.
- 11 It was thought that women and highly colored clothes attracted the sea god and trouble. Similar superstitions exist in the West about women aboard ship.
- 12 The quotation she recites is a loose Japanese translation of two verses by Ku Tao, a minor T'ang poet. As a woman without Chinese, she has understood more than might have been expected. As the next poem shows, Japanese speak not of a man but of laurel in the moon.
- 13 The poem of Abe no Nakamaro (698–770) given here is adapted from the version in which the first line reads *Ama no hara*, "the wide plains of the sky," rather than "the blue plains of the sea." Mr. Kubota Hiroshi, a high school teacher at Muroto, told Professor Konishi that a pupil had pointed out that at this season the moon cannot in fact be seen to rise from the sea, as the poem implies. Both changes reveal Tsurayuki shaping materials into art.
- 14 A north wind would be adverse to travelers heading northward along the east side of Shikoku toward the Kinki area of Honshu.
- 15 It is not known what kind of place this was, or where, but since land travelers normally prayed at the top of slopes, it was probably at some prominent coastal place familiar to sailors.
- 16 The sacred offering (*nusa*) might also be shredded paper or bark and was a Shinto offering associated with journeys.
- 17 The Festival was associated with the appreciation of pine trees, which were thought to be long-lived and propitious. Like hours of the day, days of the month and years ran on cycles of such zodiacal signs as the Rat, the Horse, etc. The Day of the Ox was thought best for clipping fingernails, the Day of the Tiger for toenails. In theory at least, such notions governed the lives of Japanese in the Heian period.
- 18 *Umimatsu*, or sea pine, is a variety of seaweed, the fanciful if inadequate marine equivalent of the pines used in the festival at the capital.
- 19 Sumiyoshi and Suminoe ("Sumi Inlet") are often used interchangeably as place names. The "grasses of forgetfulness" (*wasuregusa*) mentioned later were traditionally associated with Sumiyoshi.

- 20 Mirrors were made of metal with embossed obverse sides. For centuries they had been regarded as treasures and were among the earliest Japanese imports from the mainland. As the earlier poem on Hako Bay shows, they were kept in special boxes. The preceding sentence recalls the proverb, "We have two eyes but one thing more precious," sometimes meaning a child. Here it refers to the mirror.
- 21 The boundary marker (*miotsukushi*) is a device to indicate for navigational purposes the level of water and as such is translated "the flood gauge" by Arthur Waley, *The Tale of Genii*, 11, v. But the point here is that in entering past the marker, the travelers have come from open sea into the port.
- 22 Naniwa is the old name for what is now Osaka. As the next poem shows, reeds were associated with the area.
- 23 The leader or *funagimi* ("lord of the boat") is identified by most Japanese scholars with the former governor, the persona of Tsurayuki. That is possible but, as this episode shows, the leader is a very halting poet, unlike the former governor.
- 24 The title actually given Narihira is *chūjō*, whose modern equivalent is lieutenant general. In the Ise Monogatari, the hero (modeled on Narihira) is called at one point "Commander of the Horse Guards of the Right," and the phrase has seemed to suggest the social position of Narihira more accurately than "lieutenant general." Both for reasons of family loyalty and of personal attachment, Narihira was on close terms with Prince Koretaka, who was kept from the throne by powerful intrigue, in spite of his father's desire to have him designated heir.
- 25 Abe no Nakamaro from the eighth century and Narihira from the ninth are the only two historical, named poets in the diary. Their poems are famous for expressing depth of feeling about natural phenomena, and so fit the chief poetic principle of the diary.
- 26 The sentence is perhaps the most obscure of several uncertain ones in the diary. In this instance I have left the commentators and made a distinction between the prose words (*koto*) of the diary and the poem (*uta*) just quoted. It is possible, however, that the distinction made by Professor Konishi in his

edition between the poem just given and poetry in general is the best one.
There are other glosses as well.

- 27 Yamazaki Bridge marked the end of travel by boat up the Yodo River and so was a welcome sight.
- 28 Another obscure passage. The translation here follows the interpretation involving antithesis in the ideas of little, great; boxes, hook; etc.
- 29 Shimasaka is the place where returning travelers would cross the Katsura River into the limits of the capital.
- 30 It was common to end journeys at night, and also—as the first entry in the diary shows—so to begin them.
- 31 The Asuka River in Yamato province is famous in poetry for its changeable course, as the punning poem alluded to shows.
- 32 Translation taken from Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, Stanford, London, 1961.

CENSUS

Chris Bolin

We played a part in a meditation on the world;

we played ourselves, or ourselves in women's clothes;

and everyone cut their speaking parts;

the gulls pinned the
scattering trash;

or they did not, and it papered the windows, and some of these words
shone through;

we set fires, to recover shuttle-tiles

from the fields—and noted their frequency, on the grid

of shanties—and that the people displaced, with the image dispersed,
were among us, there;

they numbered in the thousands;

until the mourners were replaced—by the image,

in the likeness of those

who took their heads from their hands.

CARTOGRAPHER'S MOOD

You left a beautiful body behind
the granary. Morning glory wrapped
around your thigh. So still,
I thought you were in thorns.
Then he shook his crowned head in your mind
and blood trickled from your ear.
Swinging from the wand of a seismograph,
or a bird's broken leg, half-bent nails,
I imagine you climbed the tight loops of string I laid on the map,
your feet covered in powder,
sifting over wet ink.
And he cramped in the third hour
of your meditation, spinning in your mind,
arms out, touching the sides of your brain,
and then he grew a fingernail;
whiskers when you laid him down.
In the fourth hour you were alone, eyes closed,
except for a crow who was using your mind for a body,
and saw the nail holes in my eyes,
you were both holding palm leaves
and they clapped against each other
when he returned; and the fifth hour
was a scepter hitting a soldier's spear.
Then, you said, a morning glory started up the wood
and tore open its flower as fronds on guards
flew in a wind, and back against their thighs.

from DISCIPLINE

Dawn Lundy Martin

If there is prayer, there is a mother kneeling, hands folded to a private sign. We recognize it. If there is a mother kneeling, hands a tent, she is praying or she is crying or crying and praying at the same time. Although it is recognized, the signals of it, it is private and no one knows, perhaps not even she, the content of the prayer, and perhaps its object. If there is a mother praying, she is on her knees over some object, as one does not often pray in the middle of the room. One prays at the window or over the bed, the head bent slightly up or down, the eyes open or closed. This is a prayer for prayers, you know, a wanting something equal to a prayer, even though I am not a mother.

This is how much fortuitiveness weighs. Measure in dirt. Of vices and other habits. Of leaving a house at 3 A.M. and drawn as would any tether and here is your lock, my dear. I want to say this plainly: it is only when I am in a woman's arms that my body is not a threat. Neither crosses nor damnation. Fix nor flutter. Hangs here, this balance, and one opens the car door and drives along the river where it said a crossing might happen. Had happened. Many times. Sticklers will say, not here. There are no crossings here. But, there the I is, reflection and delivered, on the other side. Like hams, I think, holding on to what was.

Near adust. Caves. Closings. Relentlessly the body leaves the bed. Does things. A day is merry and eager for prosperity. It dings dings the bell in its own head. The ritual of masking the breasts in heavy fabric, of covering the legs and feet. A face from the mirror says, I am pretty, I am pretty. Skin of opening, meant for opening. A sex in training. Trimmed, fastidious. Damp reasoning. Yet, adherence. Mask the breasts. Mark the skin. *You are not from here, are you?* Part tissue. *What does it feel like?* It feels like everything else. *It must be different from some other thing.* No. This is what a woman's body is. An effort in covering or not covering. A way toward exits.

THE QUIETEST POSSIBLE,

Olivia Cronk

that once I was naked in black stockings
while you were throwing away a condom
& it was yesterday
& the winter light
made us seem like Roman children
examining a giant coin on our steps
or those obscene geese-dogs
sniffing the carpet below my train home
even though I am on the train
& you are home,
not naked, not neither of us
& not even any kind of weird, hungry animal
that I ever saw
just maybe throwing up together
when we think of time
and the universe & the like
naked or not

ORCHARD IN A FLURRY

Alexandria Peary

The ladder in the blossoms, the blossoms of pronouns
the circular he-she, white almost pink
and joined by copper wire,

blossoms in the thousands

How afraid I am of further medical intrusions

my own ego, need to control, specifically
need to not need the ones who shake trees

before their time and similar other

decisions. How they climb ladders to
shake branches as they would months later for apples
not caring about the damage.

I am afraid of the pick-and-choose.

The elimination of candidates and the crates
slightly rotten, sides leaning in like old barns.

How to explain later to the one who remains

that life is unfair and cruel at times.

Watching as a ladder of 14 c. gold like a piece of jewelry

a strangest skeleton

is with an object like tweezers set

into the petri dish the circle of inspection

bisects, and with each move the ladder doubles in size

unfolding at the waist

Shaking the trees, causing the flurry into nothingness.

The ladder that would grow into a staircase covered with toys

The ladder either left-handed

or oblivious. The ladder seeing the ladder

Later, seeing the ladder

leaning against the bottom of the tree

covered in huge circles of lichen

uncomfortable as a too-high lace collar

The ladder back on the ground.

THREE RED POEMS

Natasha Marin

1. POEM FOR THE NIGHT MY SISTER RAN AWAY

behind the window in your room
I am watching you then my mother
blinking at the turn of your back

2. POEM FOR WANTING

I try for orgasms in water

mouth open to the drops
I wash away the taste of my own salt

It smells like summer like a woman spreading her legs
It doesn't matter how many or who, a man will lay you
down: in a field in the dark in a bed in a car, on a bus,
in a rush...just as sweet as he can be when cherry-picking
and berry-picking with you. I like mine twisted
like his own mother's lips stretched fruit-wine red and
just juicing with secrets kept in shoeboxes kept folded
kept hidden kept still kept close enough to feel them
hanging folds in the air holding folds in your throat

on my knees with my fingers
the water loses heat

3. POEM FOR SATURN, RETURNING

I am wearing a mask
that is more honest
than I am

LIGHTHEAD'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

Terrance Hayes

Ladies and gentlemen, ghosts and children of the state,
I am here because I could never get the hang of Time.
This hour, for example, would be like all the others,
were it not for the rain falling through the roof.
I'd better not be too explicit. My night is careless
with itself, troublesome as a woman wearing no bra
in winter. I believe everything is a metaphor for sex.
Love-making mimics the act of departure, moonlight
drips from the leaves. You can spend your whole life
doing no more than preparing for life and thinking
"Is this all there is?" Thus, I am here where poets come
to drink a dark strong poison with tiny shards of ice,
something to loosen my primate tongue and its syllables
of debris. I know all words come from preexisting words
and divide until our pronouncements develop selves.
The small dog barking at the darkness has something to say
about the way we live. I'd rather have what my daddy calls
"skrimp." He says "discrete" and means the street
just out of sight. Not what you see, but what you perceive,
that's poetry. Not the noise, but its rhythm; an arrangement
of derangements; I'll eat you to live: that's poetry.
I wish I glowed like a brown-skinned pregnant woman.
I wish I could weep the way my teacher did as he read us
Molly Bloom's soliloquy of yes. When I kiss my wife,
sometimes I taste her caution. But let's not talk about that.
Maybe Art's only purpose is to preserve the Self.

Sometimes I play a game in which my primitive craft fires
upon an alien ship whose intention is the destruction
of the earth. Other times I fall in love with a word
like "somberness." Or moonlight juicing naked branches.
All species have a notion of emptiness, and yet
the flowers don't quit opening. I am carrying the whimper
you can hear when the mouth is collapsed, the wisdom
of monkeys. Ask a glass of water why it pities
the rain. Ask the lunatic yard dog why it tolerates the leash.
Brothers and Sisters, when you spend your nights
out on a limb, there's a chance you'll fall in your sleep.

POETRY

Joanna Klink

It left in the wind, it returned in the air.
I opened wide my door to it.

I shuttered all the rooms to block out
sunlight. It left at midnight.

It seemed to me there were birds
in that dark. I locked all the exits—

it returned in the fissures, the errors,
the marooned sulking thoughts.

What in the meantime happened
was nothing. Requiring no company,

plummeted into its own blood-
blackness. We were careless. It left

at the green summer of dawn.
Pulled us from a dream—no one

heard it. It gave every reason,
declared itself broken, gathered into

a cracked leather satchel its alarm clock
and books. I have come to tell you

there are no new stars. If you tense
against me there is history—I open

my body to it. Everyone at times
gets too close. But when I backed

into that delirium, unearthed
its warm flesh—it left. It left

with the heat from the stones and even
the dusk felt oppressive.

But when I rooted into your chest
and slept in a blue curve by

your thigh it returned. Felt
something shift in your skull—

no one saw it. Every day we must
live this. If you vanish

you are still there. Smoke,
do your laundry—one still has dignity—

no one has noticed. What good
is a conversation in darkness that

isn't raw. I boxed it up,
lived two floors above it, said

just a few words. Requiring no company
we stayed there. Inseparable

loneliness. It left, it raged,
it wished to be quit of all pain—

who can blame it? I loved it—
I opened my body to it. It tore

through my cells, blistered my eyes—
I took it into my arms told it

please. I held it to my throat un-
abashed. You are here to explain this

in torrents—a rain that never comes.
It left in the wind, it spoke as it turned,

it carried me nowhere. Pulling me
close to its cheek. Even now as it goes.

BINGO GOSSIP

S. E. Smith

A cloud of smoke shaped like Montana hangs over a water stain
shaped like the grim mouth of St. John of the Cross
and I am feeling a little sad that we have already crossed
the Great Divide, because what is left to do after that?

Let's make a grid and fill it with bright numbers.
Let's fan the pudding whose plummy heart is all flame.

Some things cannot be photographed accurately
and others are flat. I was wearing a dress made out
of RV curtains, shaped like a vase or two faces,
when Old Wealth asked me to dance. If anyone asks,
the romance of mathematics is adding, but the numbers
must be prime. The dots of paint must form a straight line.
A cloud of smoke shaped like a cloud of smoke
cannot be photographed accurately. And the pudding,
snuffed, might be the best part of the holiday.

Let's suffuse the cloud with hale, winsome mottos.
Let's pin our silhouettes to the mountain on the other side

of the Great Divide, because we've tried every other
kind of gambling, boxcar boxcar boxcar. And there is
no mercy yet. I was wearing a dress made of imitation
wood-grain. I had the winning number in my hand.

and there were big crowds of

elp

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
16 16 16 16 16 16 17 18 19 20 20 20 20 20
50

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0 0 0
pep 0
256, 998, 333 0
o e p 8
o p 5
o l 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7
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x 0 0
x ooooooooo 0 0 0 0
x 0
x x x x x x x
x
x opplepoe
x
x coats hats eyes ears teeth

I was trying to think of a word to describe it
then it came to me

the word was

herefordnarcissuseagleoakarab
manxbobwhitemountainlaurelir
iscormorantorloffangusaberdeen
hyacinthgallowaytortoiseshellheron
sycamoremacawdutchbeltedharebell
clydesdalewaterlilynullberry persian
silvertabbyredwingedblackbirdrose
ptarmiganwesthighlandchinchilla
shetlandbirchsiamesetexaslonghorn
honeysucklesandhillcranewalnut
angorapercheronbasswoodpoppy
sparrowhawkloonorchidguernsey
magnoliapelicanbluejayshire
devonsussex tulipsweetpeacrow
africandarterjerseyeasterlily
prairiehensuffolkstallionmaple
chestnutbelgianpincedarashlilac
petrelwoodcockcrocusbrownswiss
holsteindaisypheasanttigerlily

I mean the sensation I once had
when I'd been in the City too long

and wanted to get out to Uncle Rudy's farm
in Horsewater, Pa.

a sweet bit of country that
but

look

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help help help help help

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theyre going to kill me

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help help help help help

help theyve got guns help

help help help help help

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THEY'RE GOING TO KILL ME but I'll
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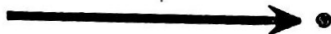
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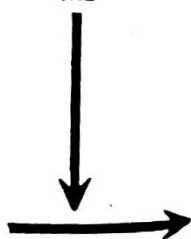
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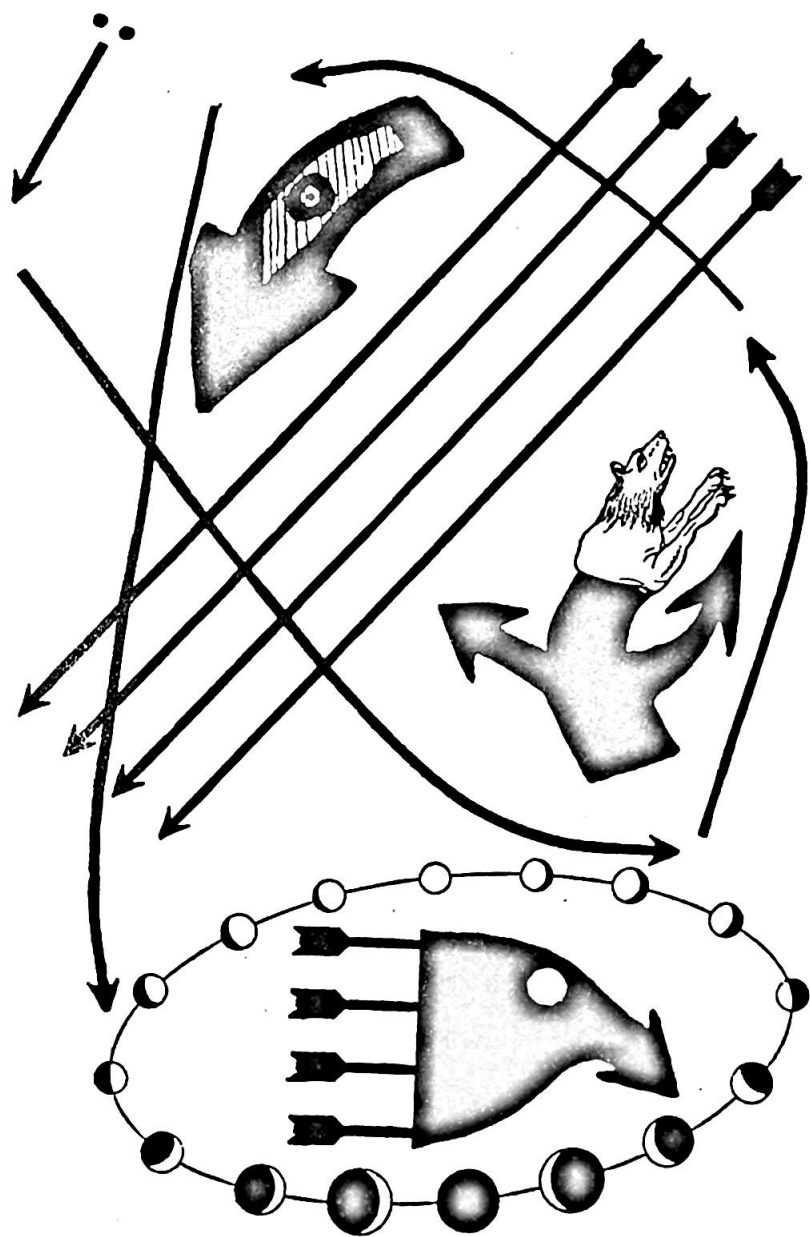
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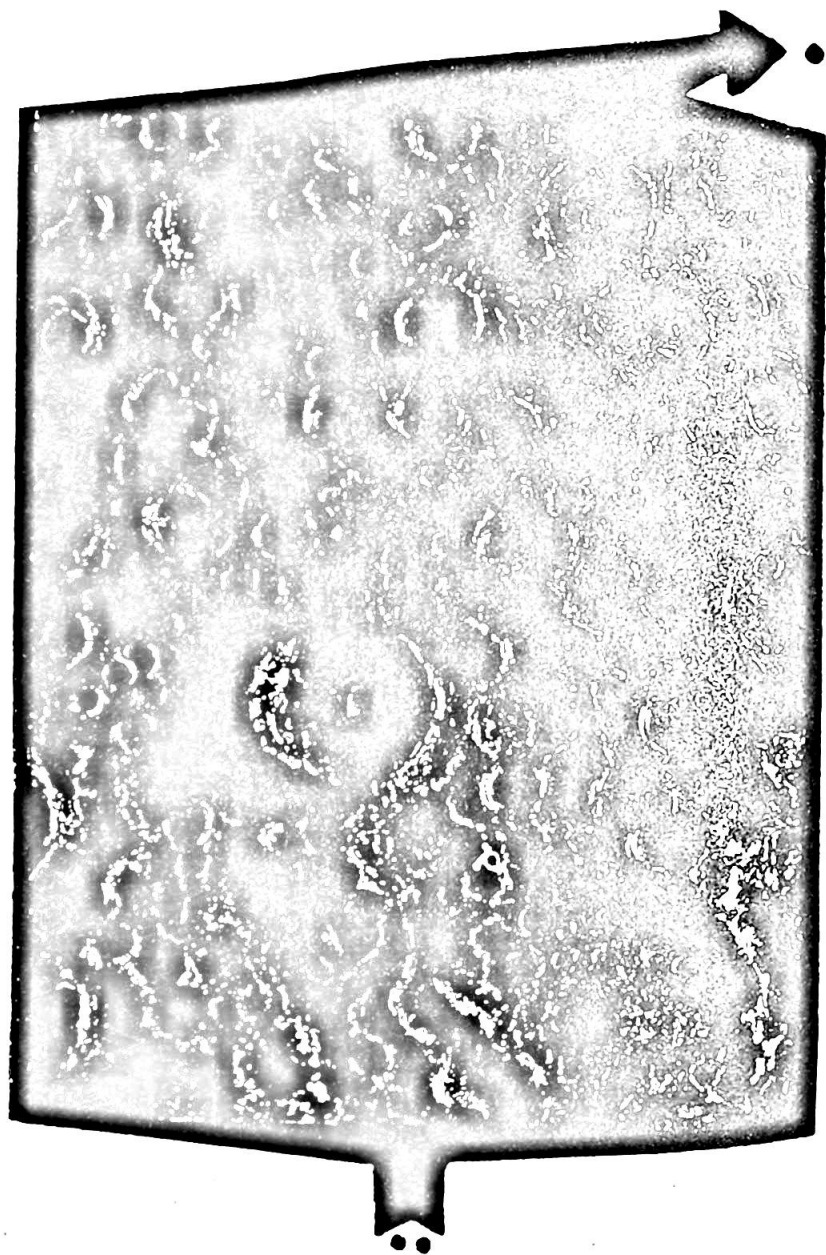
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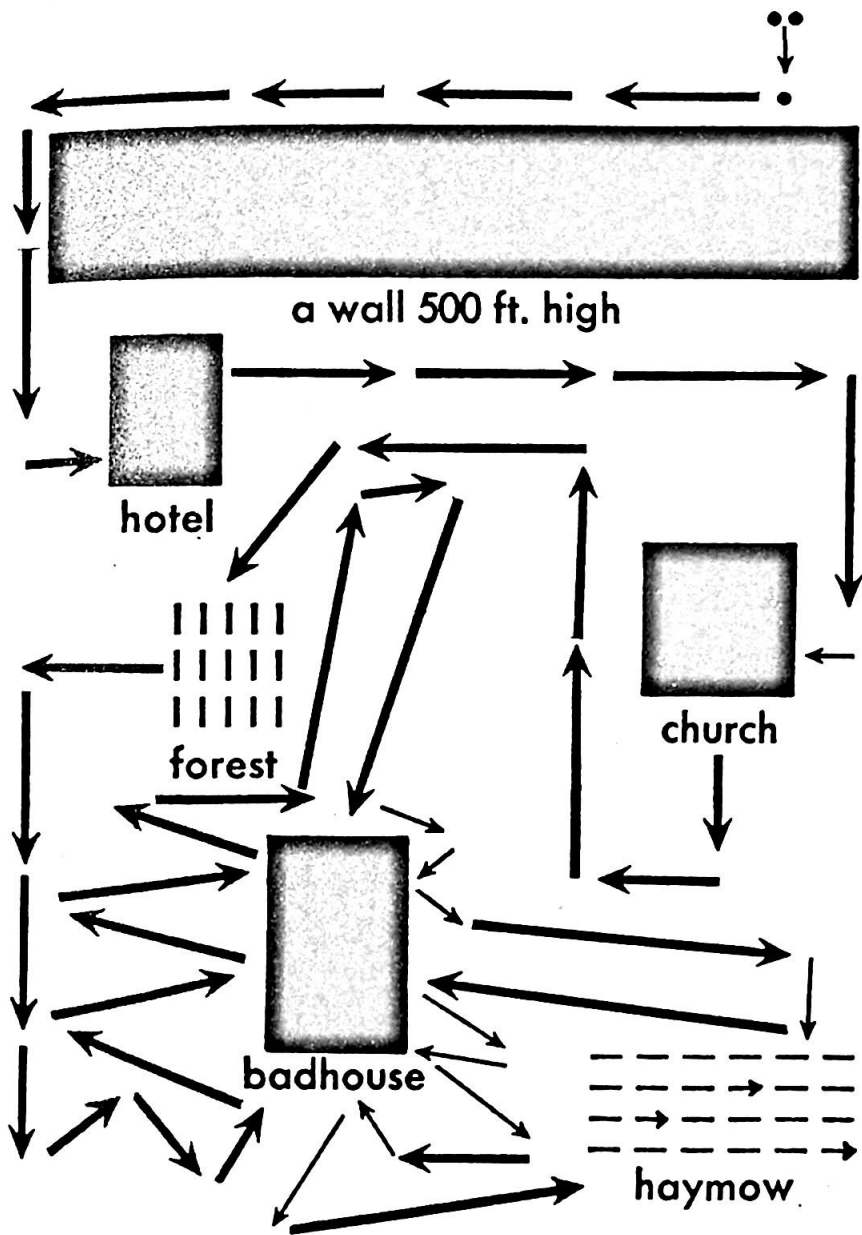


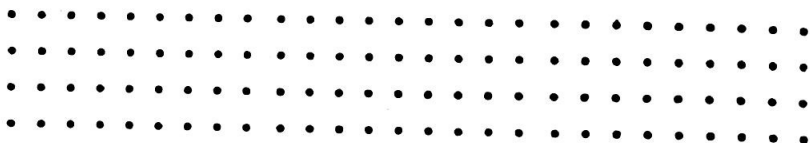
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ME











parade of the D.A.R.



ha ha
aah

HO! HO! HO! HO! HO! HO!

ouch I'm tired
are you asleep baby
sure sure

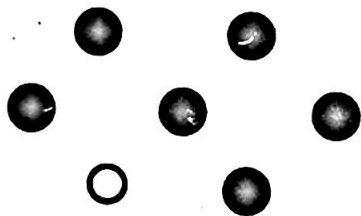
I'm better than all right
but come to think of it

why's my side of the bed warm I'd just like a good answer to that little ques-
tion honey chill' and when we get that out of the way maybe you'll tell me
how-come you handed me a box of .32s for my .45 huh what'd you say
oh let's forget it how much'd they give you

how much

talk up or I'll let you have another one
"I saw that face at the window again."
let's go to sleep now darling
this world is evil
there's no escape at all

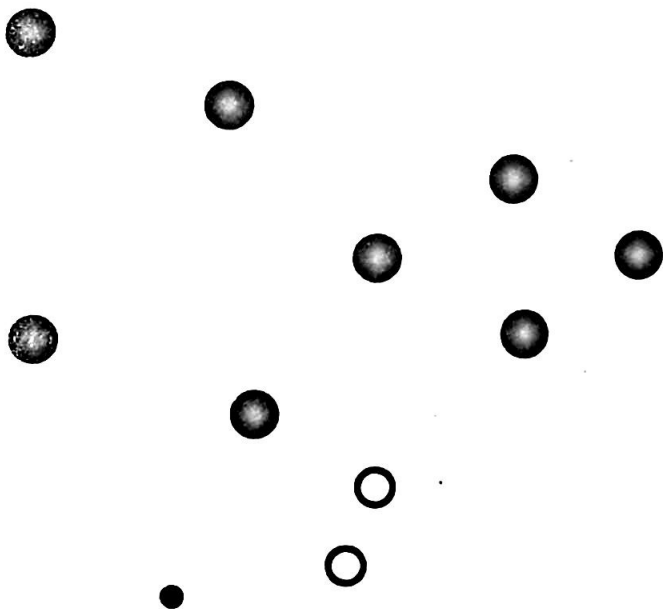
something's got a gun at our heads and I can feel
its finger tightening on the trigger
I can smell death looking at us
and the darkness is all we've got coming and
I won't have it
I won't give in
if I go out it'll be feet first
and I'll be yelling no no no you butchering bastards
this is a beautiful world
it's all wonderful
these trees
stars
children
the thing I am
and the great lovely thing my woman is
O God let us write more poems
let us sing the stars out of the sky
let us love until our mouths and hearts
get pure with it
let us make God proud of us



HURRAH!

Here they come!

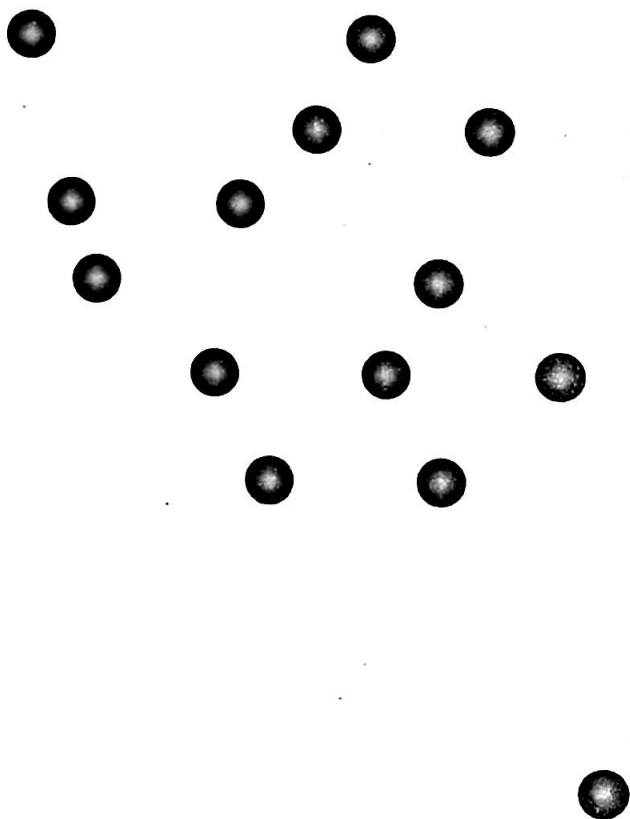
Catch one! Catch one!



LOOK AT THEM!

See how they go up!

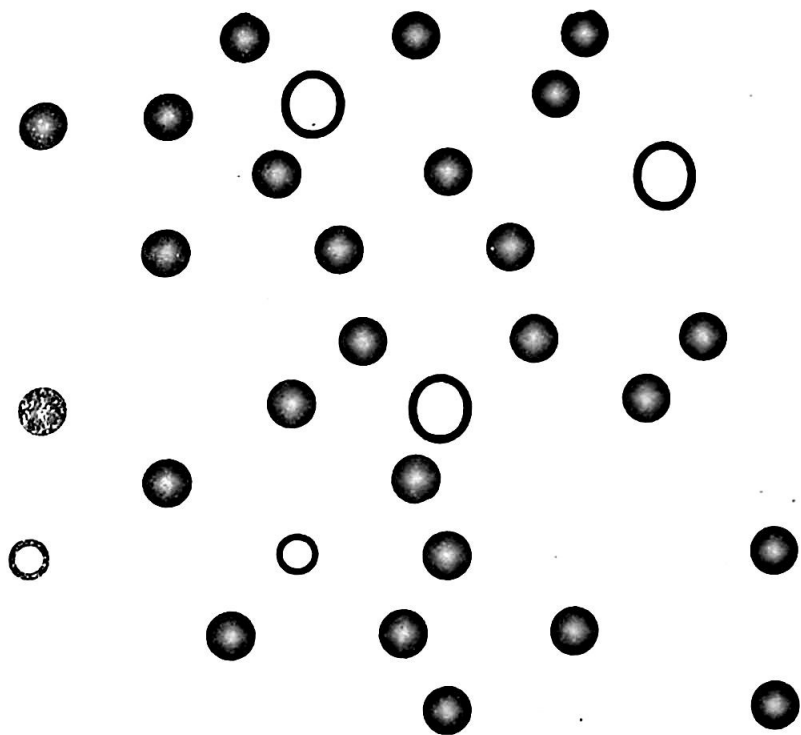
What do they care about darkness!



OHI OHI

One's coming down!

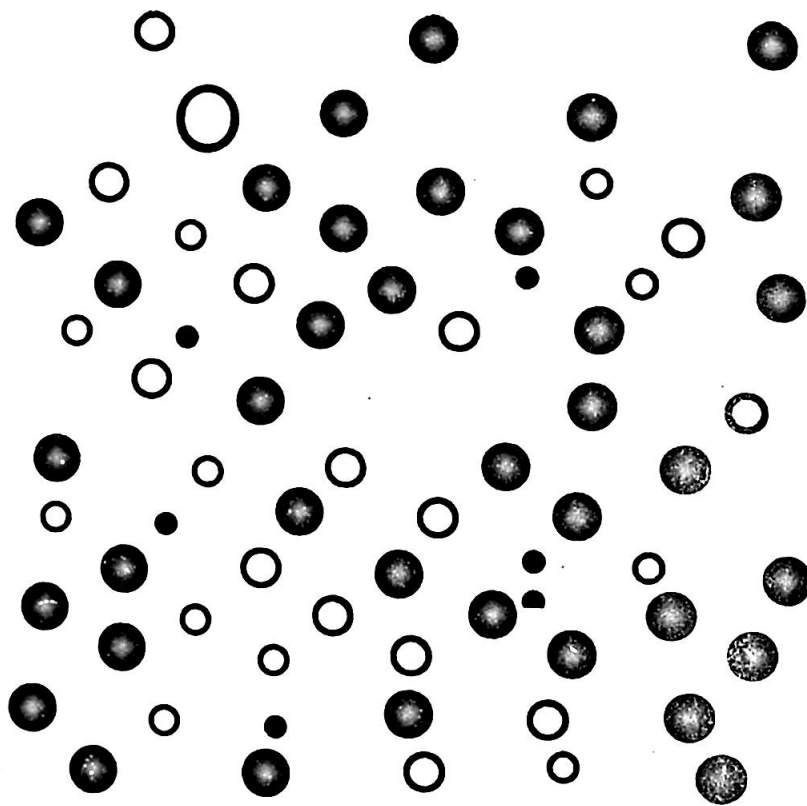
But what difference does that make!



I'LL BE CORNSWOGGLED!

Now it's going up faster than any!

Maybe it wants to make you happy.



WHAT A STACK OF PRETTIES!
I'll bet they try to pass a law against this.
But you and I know better than to care about that.

and it is beautiful
it's always beautiful
this massive and indescribable wonder
of being alive
honor all
or God is despised

○

in the same body
every heart has its sacred being

these words seem tasteless, stale
as the clothes of a corpse

★★★★★

★★★★★★★★★★

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

★★★★★★★★★★★★★ a man ★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

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SMALL GRAY HOUSE

Rachel Contreni Flynn

Once upon a time there was a girl
who began in a red brick house in a small town.

She *was* the town, in her little darkness, as she lay in the creek,
in shallow water, and became water. She curled in the arms

of a hedge apple tree and grew into that tree. After a time,
the girl never went home. The red house frightened her

with its furious air. And yet she always watched the house
from the woods, safe in the shaggy limbs of the tree.

She crept out to eat from cat dishes crusted over in the barn
and soon became a round-backed raccoon. Her brothers

pitched gravel at her in the dusk, in the wafting clouds
of mosquito mist, then gaped and chased her,

returning to the red house with implausible tales
of a scavenger wearing their sister's face.



Now there is another girl who lives
in a small gray house in another town.

She loves her mother so fiercely it makes them both
afraid of dying. She often wakes to a shadow in her room,

a smoky-black curve darting backward.
The girl cries until her mother's face rises pale

at her bedside, and the night falls away. The night
flows aside like water, like the warmth of rich earth,

before it comes back. By then the girl is asleep, curled
around the tough gray animal who never leaves.

THE TRAGEDIANS (29:51)

Jonathan Thirkield

A bout of grief whirrs the priest i'the rib cage. A numb lark on
A copper bough warms, with currents, his feet. Now he can feel
A single singing thing scratched and scratched in digits far
From boyhood through a wrongheaded grave. The way the search
Party went out, it's too far to retrace your entrance, mouths
The lark. A trail of ruddy wine on his cheeks stales. Swiftly,
He grasps the roots, and unearths a cinema among the spinets:
Spirits cast pure images. Ice spins in from the lake's edges.

Of dead forms Father is the stillest. No passages crossing by
Light or a struck wire. He is so surprised to feel anything now
That he has triggered a trap with his figures. His hand asleep
On the plectrum, the players hold every life in a single minor
Key. Simple choice fills the forests with noise. I am certain
We're lost from looking at the frost on every fallen curtain.

I saw much happier parties traveling across the same current
As the lark. They feed a wounded deer and loose their children
Into a catalog of trees. So sure they will return. These are
Dressed as well as you and I. They suffer the same, brief bouts
Of sickness. But they feel more deeply. They see more clearly
The images before them as pieces of their hearts plucked by an
Innocent. Frail hand. A voice parched. A parent stammering,
Passing through the hard ground. Moving into a peaceful age.

Spring. The lakes fill up with families. All know each other.
The children swim and learn the names of birch, knotted pine.
Every new town overlooking the woods is building us a church.
If we could see steeples through trees. Instead of following
The lark's nourishing maze of ruined wires. We'd find our way
Leaving our ancestors as characters in luminous jars buried
Under the thorn thickets. To finish our days with the living.

RIBBONS AND STRAW

Arisa White

On mornings like this I find her shirts and pants puddled at her feet, my mother sewing. The knit and stitch of parted skin puckers. Stuffs back into herself the ribbons and straw that fatten her. She hums a note, starved for more sound, I hear like a baby

I touch my insides over and over until I'm something I can put in my mouth—it's frightening to think my mother belongs to me. I see her walk down the street, crushed between King James's lips, and when she's close enough to grab my hand, she's a box of buttons

I'm lonely for my life in her hands, my mother who cannot rescue her heart from the barrel of her chest—always stealth in her love, always without the proper ear, without the proper conduit, without the sand pearling between her toes, without her calendar of holidays, without her Magdalene at her feet

She looks best when mortar, when I trust her to hold things together. In navy she sails. Returns and the notch on the doorframe has gone from here to there. We meet each other with owls in our mouths

The first to show me a pomegranate, how to eat one. Red breast in her palm, she sliced into quarters. Peels off the white skin, gently, like a woman's shirt. Her collar blushes at first touch

The sun brings down its shade, she lies asleep; I pull back her skin and lick the butter

She is a season of too much salt. Guarded in her swim, she's a strange monarch washed in waves. Her bramble hair and brand new coils have tailored the fence around her face. Always, always I'm fumbling to unlock the grief. I've given too many cards for the refrigerator door; she's a magnet for one

I tell people I leave only intentional trails. I leave my mother in the crowd; she calls like Grand Canyon's want to fill. Pulls and persuades my body no injury will come of this welcome

Nowhere will nest me. Glass holds a signature of letting go. She stands between a blow; her body smarts, learns it cannot take the same intensity. Her emotional wells. Her towel cape. She cries over her toes

I hold her like an artery above a river.

DO YOU LOOK INTO THE KEYHOLE ONLY TO FIND A MIRROR

Michael Schiavo

Nurses. Am well-liked amongst my peer group

& certain elderly women seem drawn

the way I walk is often noted.

The crayon-smell of early morning rabbits

over orchid fields. You I could

say anything right now I'll rise isosceles. Hey

withal yonder a crystal manticore

you believed the generation dead well mama

here it comes. Almost. Well there it goes

showing up a caliphate I made for you

in a class I'm taking at a nearby college.

I spent my last dollar on bad donuts.

Twenty-year megaton ramblin' 'round the rock
when I already know you. Come begging softly
under the mistletoe. Wunderkinder we salute
us in fur & feathers flash & funky
don't tell me we can't in some way we have
already pumped the volume wicked.
Shit those earmuffs. The way you apply
the lip balm liquid. Lately I talk to clouds.
They seem to wonder boom then off
over the judo rink parlay
their most masculine traits from roses
into something more. I'd ride
ride overnight to light every lantern loose.
An hour ago in the natatorium you agreed
scorching to the bedroom relieve me
of my burden. An hour ago the sun

the evening disabused us of our dreams
toasted over marshmallow laid out
for a daring switcheroo involving
Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* as performed by
hermit crabs who've lost their shells
permanently & barbecue as I have never
feasted. Where'd it all get lost?
Somewhere over the western coast
a young woman is explaining to her son
about the United States of America.
You & me. All the way you say a thing
maybe but maybe the sexiest body
part's the knuckle maybe just yours.
If I can find such good glory why you blush
when I say your face is a day the tang
the mid-autumn air from the spit turning

& turning not toward love

not away but really just the world.

BIRD WATCHING AT NIGHT

Sherman Alexie

What kind of bird is that?

An owl.

What kind of bird was that?

Another owl.

Oh, that one was too quick and small to be an owl. What was it?

A quick and small owl.

Once, while driving at night, when I was sixteen, I was driving with my girlfriend, up on Little Falls Flat, and this barn owl swooped down into the road, maybe fifty feet or so in front of us, and came flying straight at our windshield. It was huge, like pterodactyl-size, and my girlfriend screamed. And, well, I screamed, too, because that thing was heading straight for us, but you know what I did? I slammed on the gas and sped toward that owl. Do you know why I did that?

Because you wanted to play chicken with the owl.

That's exactly what I was doing.

So what happened then?

When we were maybe a second from smashing into each other, that owl just flapped its wings, but barely. What's a better word than "flap?" What's

a word that still means, "flap," but a smaller "flap?"

How about "slant?"

Oh, yes, that's pretty good. So, like I was saying, as that owl was just about to smash into our windshield, it "slanted" its wings, and "slanted" up into the dark. And it was so friggin' amazing, you know? I just slammed on the brakes and nearly slid into the ditch. And my girlfriend and I were sitting there in the dark, with the engine tick, tick, ticking like some kind of bomb, but an existential bomb, like it was just measuring out the endless nothingness of our lives because that owl had nearly touched us but was gone forever. And I kept thinking about how, in many tribal cultures, including my own tribe, that the owl is the messenger of death. And so I'm wondering what that owl was trying to say to me. What amazing message. So I said something to my girlfriend like, "That was magnificent," and my girlfriend, you want to know what she said?

She said something like, "I'm breaking up with you."

Damn, that's exactly what she said. And I asked her, "Why are you breaking up with me?" And do you know what she said?

She said, "I'm breaking up with you because you are not an owl."

Yes, yes, yes, and you know what, I have never stopped thinking about her. It's been twenty-seven years and I still miss her. Why is that?

Brother, you don't miss her. You miss the owl.

BLACK MEMORABILIA

CM Burroughs

I.

[In this position in the poem: a maidservant.] See: mammy/nanny/au pair, slipping into tarnish like caviar spoons. This is a corner for thinking about what I've done—placed my hands over a series, a collection, of rouged lips and their melanin-fringed rims. [Reclamation.] I have faced the question: *What* are you? In my dream, I am flanked by such a number of windows that my limbs are bound by light. Yellow girl. How do I say no to that much canvas? As the poet of the poem, I say No. I say Black. Behind me, horizon fills with saliva.

II.

I write fuck scenes in which you open your mouth, your anthems and idols gone. No *Dream*, no *Stony the road*, flight to no motherland. By no agency of my own, your teeth lose root. Like so: *post-* slides into your dailiness...call it *counter-Culture*. Post-Black. Fancy it. [In this position in the poem:] I am strong enough to hurt

you. I pry floorboards and lift out your artifacts. *What* am I? Do you hate me now?

III.

...Will eat you...Will chew your nails. [Consumption.] My teeth in our body. My body in our teeth. How easily we pass. There is danger in how we see one another. In anthems, idols. This I mean of all Blacks, all Negroes. Hand to mouth. Shoulder to tongue. Nipple to throat. Crude to think we could sex *We* back. Thrill the threat of returning. Bound as we were, natural from the root, shine-eyed, having lightness.

IV.

This is a treatise on loyalty. My beloved feature of the Black man is his edge, the tender shape of Otherness, careful valley of chain. When he fucks me, isn't he uprising? Stealing back his mother/sister/woman bound by light? I let the tension move through me. Try not to scream. Try to bear the whip of umbilical cords, breasts and bone. To be entered. To be exited. I lie on the cusp of our room. Between.

O B A M A

Melanie Henderson

A

A headrest or the back
Of a wooden pew.
Four fingers meditating
Over the others,
The remaining two: intertwined.

B

I suspect he's in my bathwater
Making me new again,
Hope like.

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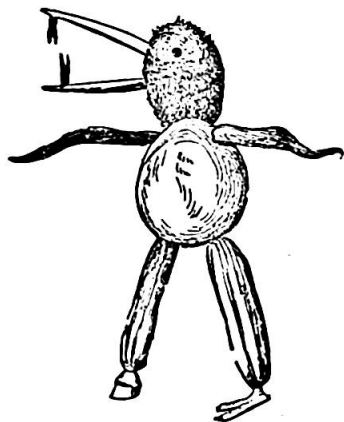
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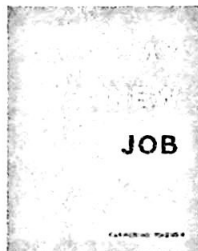
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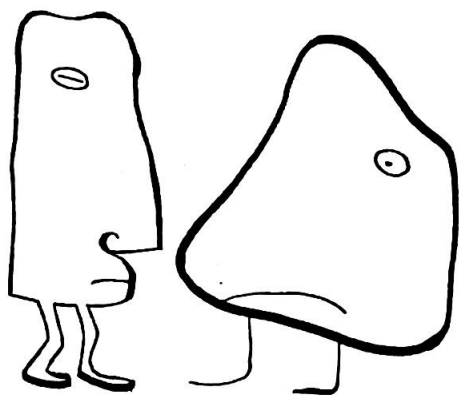
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